MEA CULPA

A Woman's Last Word

HENRY HARLAND

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A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

BY

HENRY HARLAND

(SYDNEY LUSKA)

AUTHOR OF

"AS IT WAS WRITTEN," ETC., ETC.

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MEA CULPA:

A WOMAN'S LAST WORD.

PART I.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

To

TH. BENTZON:

IF IN THE PAGES THAT FOLLOW I HAVE FAILED TO
POINT A MORAL, MAY I AT LEAST MAKE
SURE OF ADORNING A TALE BY
BEGINNING MINE WITH
YOUR BRILLIANT
NAME?

I.

THIS narrative, which will be true in all its details, the most incidental as well as the most intimate and essential—true in letter as in spirit—reaches its catastrophe and conclusion here in London in the summer of the year 1890. But it must begin in Paris in the month of March seven years before.

We had lived in Paris, my father and I, since 1879. First, I will explain, very briefly, why we lived there; secondly, I will describe the manner of our life there.

My father, Paul Mikhaelovitch Banakin, had never associated himself, directly or indirectly, with the revolutionary movement in Russia. He was, indeed, a man of liberal views; a Radical, even, in the sense that, despising ready-made formulas and loving realities, he went to the root of every question that he pretended to touch; a Republican, if you wish, in his political ideals; and as for religion, though he was neither an atheist nor an agnostic, he had convictions of his own which prevented him from finding the least spiritual satisfaction in the ceremonial religion of the Russian Church. In so far, then, he was perhaps of the same stuff as the active members of the revolutionary party; but in so far only. For of the aims, the methods, and the cardinal principles of the revolutionists he totally disapproved. "The revolutionary programme," I have often heard him say, "has been conceived in folly, and must be executed, if at all, in crime. It is the production of brains that have been but half baked. It illustrates what a dangerous thing a little learning is. It authors are men who have rapidly swallowed, without digesting, the most obvious and superficial deductions of modern scientific thought, but have never even caught the aroma of its more occult significance, its deeper tendencies, or its remoter corollaries. They would endeavor to force at once, by violence, changes which, in the nature of things, must come to pass slowly, by a process of growth. For me, I am too much of a philosopher, I have read my history too thoroughly, to share their theories; and with their practice how can any civilized human being feel the slightest sympathy? To Tsar-murder, terrorism, dynamite—in one word, to warfare by stealth—I pronounce myself an unrelenting foe."

Such, roughly, was my father's attitude toward the revolutionary agitation in Russia. Yet in 1879 he had, at a moment's notice, to fly from his country, like a thief in the night, and seek an asylum in France, lest he should be arrested and transported to Siberia as a political offender.

Why?

Because one evening, in the early spring of that year, we received a domiciliary visit from the police, at our apartment in St. Petersburg; and (my father being an omnivorous reader) there, in plain evidence, upon the table and in the shelves of our library, lay certain books, pamphlets, and periodicals which it was forbidden for Russian subjects to have in their possession, as well as certain manuscripts in which my father had set down the results of his speculations in various branches of political science, theology, and metaphysics. All this compromising literature, printed and written, the police seized; but, since they did not at once deprive my father of his liberty, he, the most optimistic and hopeful of men, believed that the matter would end there, and made light of my anxiety lest something more serious might come of it.

In this, however, as the event proved, he was mistaken.

Suddenly, one day, a week or so later, he received a communication from a friend of his, a functionary of the highest rank, and one who would surely know whereof he spoke, warning him that his arrest and deportation to Siberia had been determined upon, and urging him to leave Russia without an hour's delay. "I enclose passports with false names for you and Monica Paulovna," his friend concluded. . . .

So, with a few hundred rubles in his pocket, and such clothing as could hastily be thrown into a portmanteau, my father—accompanied, of course, by me, his only child, —took the first train for the frontier; and a few days later we were in the French capital.

That is why we lived in Paris.

The manner of our life there. . . . *Ah, Dieu de dieu, voilà une histoire!*

At first we lived in sufficient comfort at one of the hotels in the neighborhood of the Opéra; for my father did not so much as dream that his properties would be put under the seal of the Government, and fully expected to touch his income as regularly henceforth abroad as formerly at home. But in this he was very soon undeceived. Writing to the manager of his estates to command remittances, he was informed by return of post that his revenues had been stopped by the authorities, pending his appearance in St. Petersburg to answer the charges of political untrustworthiness there lying against him.

After that, the question of ways and means became for us of the most pressing nature.

The little ready money that he had taken with him upon our flight had rapidly dwindled, until now less than a thousand francs remained; and where more was to come from was a dubious and appalling problem. My father, a Russian noble of the old style, was the incarnation of the unpractical; intensely proud, sensitive to the point of effeminacy, accustomed to every luxury, and as irresponsible as a child in the handing of money; a man who had never earned, nor thought of earning, a kopeck, yet who had never hesitated to throw away a hundred rubles; a man, in fact, who had done nothing all his life but dream, read, talk, and spend; than whom there could be no one more amiable, more polished, or more inefficient. He was gifted with a fine intellect, and in the face of an abstract theory of any kind was all enlightenment and penetration; but the smallest concrete difficulty left him as dismayed and as helpless as a baby. How was such a man to provide food, clothing, and a home for himself and his eighteen-year-old daughter? . . . . This was an enigma over which my father pondered much, about which he discoursed much, but in relation to which he did—nothing, except wring his hands and weep.

Gradually I came to realize that the duties of breadwinner must necessarily devolve upon me.

What could I do?

I was a good pianist. I could teach music, if I could find pupils.

I had had an English—or, rather, an American—governess from the time I was five till I was fifteen years old; therefore I could also teach English, or I could translate.

I had finally a little talent for drawing and painting, which might possibly be turned to some practical account.

That was what I felt I could do. But there was another question for me to face, almost equally grave: What would my father allow me to do? I knew that he would object passionately to my doing any work at all for pay. I knew that, upon my broaching the subject, he would cry out, "I would rather starve!" . . . I knew, in one word, that we should have a struggle.

To cut a long story short, we had a struggle that lasted several days; for two of those days my father would not speak to me, thinking in that way to make me feel his displeasure and to break my will; but in the end my obstinacy proved to be of sterner stuff than his, and I gained my point. At least, he said: "Do as you please, do as you please."

Then I began to work.

I gave lessons in music and in English to the pupils whom I was able to procure; I translated sensation novels, English and American, into French, receiving four hundred francs for each volume from a publisher in the Palais Royal; and I colored photographs for a photographer in the Rue de Rivoli. (Since my marriage, I may say in passing, that publisher has caused to be printed upon the title-pages of the novels I anonymously translated for him, "*Traduit de l'anglais par Madame la Princesse Léonticheff:*" whether to the greater annoyance of Prince Léonticheff or myself it would be difficult to tell.) Thus I contrived to gain a livelihood for my father and myself; but, believe me, it was a most meagre, shabby, and precarious livelihood. For my own part, however, I must own that I was not altogether unhappy. It was my youth, no doubt, which enabled me to adapt myself to our changed conditions without too much discomfort. Besides, I was thoroughly occupied; I had no time, no strength, for discontent. Indeed, had it not been for the constant sense of care and responsibility that I carried with me, I should have had little to complain of. But my poor father! For him, as he often said, it was scarcely less than purgatory. Deprived of all that ease and largeness of existence to which from his cradle he had been habituated, he suffered keenly also from the humiliation of finding himself dependent for his daily bread upon the exertions of his daughter. His only solace lay in devising schemes by which to re-establish the family fortune . . . oh, but schemes! At last he put one of them in operation. After the assassination of the Emperor he began to write a history of Russia, from the earliest times to the present day. Once completed, he was sure the publishers would vie with each other to purchase his manuscript. At all events, it kept him busy, and so perhaps rendered him less conscious of the privations of his life than he would otherwise have been.

In the matter of lodgings we had gone steadily from bad to worse, until now, in 1883, we had two communicating rooms up four flights of winding stairs in the Hôtel du St. Esprit, a dingy *maison garnie*, inhabited chiefly by students, in the Rue St. Jacques; certainly, in view of my sex, not the most desirable quarter of Paris, but considering our requirements, the cheapest. Our morning coffee and our mid-day breakfast I prepared over a spirit-stove; for our dinner we went to a restaurant in the Boulevard St. Michel, where a table d'hôte—of a merit by no means extraordinary, it is true—was to be had for one franc twenty-five. For the society of congenial human beings, I confess, we pined. The French students by whom we were surrounded we had no reason to love. Almost our only friend was the composer Armidis, half Greek, half English, an inspired musician, an exquisite poet, and the handsomest, the shabbiest, the most improbable, whimsical, and entertaining man I had ever known. He dwelt on the other side of the Seine, but he came frequently to see us, and would often meet us at the ordinary where we dined. The worst dinner, with Armidis at the table, was always a merry and delightful affair. He was in receipt of an excellent income, and had no one but himself to spend it on; yet one of his eccentricities forbade his ever buying a suit of clothes. He always wore the cast-off garments of his friends! The effect was generally fearful and wonderful. Seeing him from behind you would have thought, "a beggar." But the moment you beheld his face, with its snow-white hair and beard, his fresh complexion, his fine, proud features, his large eyes, full of color, daring, and intelligence, you would have corrected yourself: "No; a man of genius and distinction, a poet, an artist, a prince among artists, in masquerade."

We were, it must be admitted, Bohemians; but Bohemians from necessity, not from choice. Even I, resigned as I was to our circumstances, would have been surprised if anybody had told me that I was happy. Yet now I know that those were almost the happiest days of my life.

II.

My father's duties as the historian of Russia required him to go a good deal to the public libraries, for the purpose of consulting authorities. He would frequently leave the Hôtel du St. Esprit directly after his morning coffee, and not return till toward the hour for dinner. On these occasions he would take his second breakfast at some cheap restaurant in the quarter where he was at work.

One evening in the early part of March, 1883, when he came home from a day spent abroad like this, I saw, the instant he entered our rooms, that something had happened to disturb his tranquillity. He was manifestly in a state of great nervous excitement, which he was doing his utmost to conceal, but which anybody with the smallest faculty for observation could not have failed to discover at a single glance: excitement, moreover, which was plainly of a sorrowful, not of a joyful nature. A spot of scarlet burned in either cheek. He kept his eyes persistently averted from mine; but now and then I caught a glimpse of them, in spite of him, and then I saw that they were red and swollen, as if he had been weeping. At dinner, though he tried hard to eat, it was evident that he had no appetite; his hands shook, that held his knife and fork; when he spoke, which he did but seldom and briefly, though he was ordinarily a voluble talker, his voice trembled, and it had a peculiar strained ring. After dinner he sat for two hours or more motionless before our fireplace, glaring at the coals, once in a while breathing a prodigious sigh, but never uttering a syllable.

I was puzzled and frightened, yet something withheld me from questioning him. I felt that it would be better to wait until in his own time he should volunteer an explanation; which I did not doubt that he would sooner or later do, for he was a man who craved sympathy in all his emotions, sad or glad, as irresistibly as his body craved food, drink, or sleep. . . . At last, however, still without a word, he rose, put on his overcoat, and took his hat and stick.

At that I could hold in no longer.

"You are going out?" I inquired.

"You see it, do you not?" he answered, a little petulantly.

"Where are you going?"

"Where? What is that to you? Must I account to you for all my movements?"

"Certainly not. Only, I should like to know; and I had no reason to suppose that you would object to telling me—that is all."

"Well, I am going nowhere—anywhere—to walk."

"It is late. It is past eleven. You had better go to bed."

"Bed!" he cried, in his strained, unnatural voice. "And what for, pray?"

"To sleep, of course," said I.

My father could never bring himself to realize that I was a grown-up woman; he invariably treated me, and doubtless thought of me, as a little silly girl in pinafores. . . .

"My child," he now replied, with an accent of profound solemnity, "I shall never be able to sleep again. You, who are young, you, who do not know what care and responsibility mean—you may sleep. For me, I have that upon my mind which renders the very name of sleep preposterous."

Also, at his moments of emotional disturbance, he was prone to don, in approaching me, an armor of magniloquence, to become oracular and rhetorical, if not even a little theatrical.

"You had better tell me what it is," I urged. "You had better share your trouble with me. Two pairs of shoulders can bear it more easily than one."

He looked at me very hard for an instant; his eyes began to blink, his lips to pucker; he burst into tears.

"What is it? What is it, father?" I entreated.

He shrugged his shoulders, and, with a despairing gesture, cried out, "I am a ruined man, a ruined man! When you stopped me, do you know what I was going to do?" he asked. "I was going out to put an end to my existence. Within a few minutes I should have been lying dead at the bottom of the Seine. To-morrow you would have found my lifeless corpse upon the marbles of the Morgue."

He sank into his old seat before the fire, and passively allowed me to take his hat and stick. For some minutes he wept silently without speaking. I knelt at his side, and held his hand, and waited.

By and by, always with a certain magniloquence, and employing the tone that one would naturally use in explaining the affairs of an adult to a little child—addressing me, that is to say, *de haut en bas*—he proceeded to make the following confession, in his studied, old-fashioned French:

"I am, as I have already told you, a ruined man. The story is of the shortest, the simplest, the most tragical. Young as you are, I believe that you had better hear it, so that you may understand the fatal combination of circumstances that drive your father to a premature and ignominious grave." . . .

His voice died out, and for a breathing-space he was silent. Then he went on:

"Figure to yourself that to-day, at noon, as I was leaving the Bibliothèque Nationale, to go to breakfast at a neighboring table d'hôte, I had no sooner set my foot in the street than I ran almost into the arms of . . . whom do you think? My old friend Sagoskin, Serge Petrovitch Sagoskin, the author of 'Russ and Finn,' whom I had not seen for a matter of five years. He greeted me with the utmost effusiveness, inquired cordially about you, and insisted upon my accompanying him to his hotel, to meet the distinguished novelists Z—— and X——, whom he had invited to breakfast. I assented with pleasure; and we had a most delightful meal, diversified by conversation as edifying as it was entertaining, and in which, you will be glad to learn, your father did not shine only as a listener."

"Yes? yes?" I prompted, as he paused again.

"Well, my child, as we were taking our coffee, Sagoskin proposed a little turn at *Zinkalinka*—a proposition which was generally received with acclamation, and to which I, for one, agreed the more readily, because, invariably enjoying good fortune at cards, I was confident that I should lose nothing, and hopeful, my dear, of winning enough to constitute an acceptable addition to our fund of ready money—though, indeed, the game being undertaken for amusement purely and simply, was projected upon so small a scale that no one could win enough to talk about. But see how things turn out! From the beginning I lost; and contrary to every reasonable probability, I lost constantly to the end. It was a complete *déveine*. Reluctant to show the white feather to my antagonists, and animated by the conviction that the luck must infallibly change, as well as by the desire to retrieve my losses, if not to come away a gainer, I continued to play until I found that I owed the bank, which was held by Sagoskin himself, a matter of five hundred francs. Then, in despair, I pleaded an appointment with you, and took my leave. I explained to my host that I did not happen to have five hundred francs upon my person, and gave him my note-of-hand for the amount, promising to redeem it to-morrow morning. . . . Such, in fine, is the dilemma in which I find myself placed. Inspired by the ambition, not ignoble, to contribute what I might to the expenses of my family, and having every reason to believe that Providence had put in my way an opportunity for doing so, I am, by an entirely unprecedented and anomalous run of ill-luck, reduced to this desperate alternative : either I must pay Sagoskin five hundred francs to-morrow, or I must avoid dishonor by taking my life."

He drew a long breath and flourished his hand, to indicate that his narrative was finished. Clearly he did not reproach himself; it was not for me to reproach him.

Presently he added, in the tone of a man moralizing upon a perfectly impersonal event: "It is one of those incomprehensible examples of the apparently blind and wanton brutality of Fate, which force certain thinkers to accept the atheistic and pessimistic hypothesis of life, that you should lose a father, that Russia should lose an historian, and that I should be cut off in the very prime of my career, all for a paltry consideration of five hundred francs!"

In a moment he demanded, "How much money have you in hand?"

"Less than two hundred francs," I answered; "and we shall need every penny of that to pay our way to the end of the month."

"Have we any property that . . . that you could exchange for money at the Mont de Piété?"

"Alas, my father, I have already pledged everything that we had of value in the world. Our jewellery is all gone.

Only our clothing is left; and you know as well as I do how much, or rather how little, that is worth."

"But your furs?"

"Sold as long ago as November."

"*Eh bien*, it is then as I supposed. I must die."

I paid little heed to his talk of suicide, for I knew that it was but a figure of speech. "If you should go to Serge Petrovitch," I ventured, "and frankly explain to him your circumstances, and ask to be forgiven a debt which is, after all, only a card debt, and not one contracted for an equivalent?"

"*Seigneur Dieu!*" he exclaimed. "Is my daughter, then, devoid of the least sentiment of pride, of honor? . . . Monica, I would rather die a hundred deaths!"

"Well, then . . . ?" I questioned.

"It comes to this: we must borrow."

"Whom can we borrow from?"

"Reflect a moment. You will see that there is but one person in Paris to whom we can apply for a loan."

"Who is that? I cannot think of any one."

"Why, Armidis, of course."

"Oh!" I cried.

"Yes; we must borrow five hundred francs from Armidis. He will gladly lend them, I am sure. He is all good-nature."

"But how are we ever to repay him?"

My father shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, we must somehow achieve the impossible. Or perhaps something will turn up. But that is a question for the future. For the present our dilemma stands thus: we must borrow five hundred francs from Armidis, or I must take my life."

"Very good," I acquiesced, though with a heart by no means light. "Then you must go to Armidis in the morning and borrow the money."

"*I?*" my father almost screamed, starting half-way to his feet. "*I* go to him? . . . Are you mad? Or is it that you have not the faintest comprehension of my character? Rather than ask Armidis to lend me a sou I would cut out my tongue!"

"But then---?" I faltered.

"No; it is you, my child, you who are young, and who do not feel these things as I feel them—it is you who must go to Armidis. Go to him in the morning, *raconte lui quelque histoire*, and bring the money home to me. . . . Do not refuse," he implored passionately. "I exact it by right of my position as your parent," he added with an accent of authority.

"If I go to Armidis for you," I returned, "I cannot tell him a story. I must tell him the truth."

"In other words, you will sacrifice your father's honor!" he cried, wildly.

"I can't see how your honor will be involved. You have done nothing dishonorable," said I.

"You are right," he agreed, his excitement suddenly subsiding. "Armidis, though not a man of the world, has sense and reason. He will understand. . . . Then you will go?"

"Yes, I will go."

"Ah-h-h!" sighed my father, a long sigh of relief.

His relief presently intensified into a complete reaction of spirits. He opened a bottle of wine and demanded something to eat.

"We will sup, *ma fille*. We will forget our late annoyances in a little feast. . . . Oh, you are a good girl"—he took my chin in his hands and smiled into my eyes—"yes, a very good little girl. I cannot complain of you. You are, as the English say, a chip of the old block."

He was very merry and good-natured for the rest of the night.

"If I had played a little longer," he declared, "the luck would certainly have changed. It was bound to do so by the immutable law of chances. Yes, I conclude that I was foolish to withdraw from the game. If I had persevered I might have brought you home. . . . who knows how many hundreds, how many thousands of francs?"

After I kissed him good-night, and had reached the threshold of his room, on the way to my own, he called me back; and holding his candle above his head, so that it cleared my face and left his own in shadow, "If—if you should ask Armidis for a thousand, instead of five hundred?" he suggested.

I was perplexed. "But why? What for?" I queried.

"Why, then I could resume the game to-morrow, and take my revenge."

"Oh!"

"Well?"

"Oh, no, I cannot. It is out of the question."

"But be reasonable. It is the quickest way of repaying him. I should expect to win twice, three times, as much. By the law of chances I can prove to you that the probabilities are as one million to one against my losing."

"No, no, no," I insisted.

He gave a gesture of impatience. Then he paused, and seemed to meditate for a moment. In the end, "I will speak to you again in the morning," he said. "Good-night."

III.

He was as good as his word; and in the morning, surely enough, he renewed his efforts to persuade me to ask Armidis for double the amount of his indebtedness to Sagoskin. He began by commanding me to do so, by virtue of his position as my father. Failing in that, he sought by argument to convince me that it would be wise and right. Finally, he addressed his appeal to my love for him, not to deny him what he so earnestly desired. But I was firm in my refusal.

"Very well," he said at last. "I must submit to your feminine unreasonableness and obstinacy. I must suffer, though I should be hypocritical if I pretended to forgive, your unfilial disobedience. Go, then, at once, and fetch the money. I will wait for you here. You ought not to be gone longer than a couple of hours at the furthest. . . . Go. Why do you delay?"

"My dearest father," I returned, speaking as gently as I could, yet fearing that my words would provoke a storm, "I implore you not to be angry with me; but it is impossible . . . let me explain . . . it is impossible for me to go at once. This, as you know, is my busiest day in all the week. I have lessons continuously till three o'clock. If I disappoint my pupils, I not only lose the price of their lessons—which we could ill afford at any time—but I run the risk of being dismissed from their employment. That would be to fly in the face of Providence, especially in view of our present difficulty. I cannot reach Armidis's house before this afternoon."

"In that case," said he, with an effect of the calmness of despair, "you need not go at all. Debts of this nature must be liquidated within twenty-four hours, or the debtor is forever dishonored. I must hand the money to Sagoskin before five o'clock this evening, or I must die. Since you deem your lessons to be of superior importance to your father's honor, even to his life, go to them. That is my last word, . . . except adieu."

"*Au revoir, mon cher petit père*," I said, kissing him on the forehead, and stroking his fleecy thin white hair. "I will have the money here by half-past four at the latest. It will not take you more than half an hour to go to Sagoskin's hotel, so that before five o'clock you and he will be quits. *Au revoir.*"

"*Au revoir, ma fille*," he responded, relapsing suddenly into his simple, cheerful self. "I shall spend the day quietly at home, arranging the notes I took at the library yesterday morning."

I had never been at Armidis's lodgings, but I knew that he lived at No. 239, Avenue de la Grande Armée, away out beyond the Arc de l'Étoile, near the Porte Maillot. It was a quarter-past three when I inquired for him of the concierge.

"Yes, madame; Monsieur Armidis is at home," the concierge informed me. "At the bottom of the court, staircase A, fourth story, at the left."

I crossed a damp and dirty courtyard, which reeked dreadfully of the stables by which it was surrounded, and in which a stableman, who treated me to an inquisitive stare, was busy washing a carriage; passed through a narrow, dirty doorway, distinguished by a huge A in red paint; climbed four flights of dark back stairs, that smelled forcibly of cooking, whereof onions and cabbages seemed to furnish the basis; and pulled the bell-cord at the left-hand side of the last landing.

My heart was beating strenuously. I felt that I had come upon a very delicate and painful errand, and I prayed mentally for strength and courage to perform it. Though my poor dear father chose not to acknowledge it, I believe that I was naturally as proud and as sensitive as himself, and that I shrank as fearfully as he could have done from the humiliation of asking Armidis to lend me money. I tried to think how I had better word my request ; and the possibility of a refusal, of a rebuff, was constantly present to my imagination. It was also entirely possible that he might not have five hundred francs to lend, in which case . . . ! Several minutes passed, and the bell had not been answered. I rang again. What if he should be absent, after all? The concierge might easily have made a mistake. Again I waited several minutes, and still the door remained closed in my face. A good deal disheartened, I rang for a third time.

At last came the sound of footsteps from within. Then, from behind the door, Armidis's lusty voice, with an accent of plaintive remonstrance, called out in French, "Yes, yes. I hear. I'm wake. No need to ring a thousand times! I'm not, upon my word, I'm not the Sleeping Beauty. Now go away, and in ten minutes you may bring me my coffee."

"Mr. Armidis," I said in English, "it is I—Monica Banakin."

"Oh! You don't say so! Is it really? Why, how do you do? I thought it was the concierge come to wake me up. And I was vexed with him for ringing so many times. As if I were deaf! It seemed so unfeeling of him. Oh, they're a bad lot, *ces concierges*. Outrageous! . . . You—you don't mind, do you? Say that you don't mind."

"Mind! Mind what?"

"Why, my having thought it was the concierge. I never would have thought it if I had known that it was you. But, you see, I really couldn't know, could I? I was expecting him. I'm so sorry. I hope you don't feel hurt about it."

"Oh, no, not in the least," I assured him, laughing.

"So good of you. I was sure you wouldn't. You've got such a kind heart under your forbidding exterior. You couldn't nurse resentment when no offence was intended. But I thank you very much, all the same. And it's really Monica Banakin—really? You're not trying to deceive me? Of course, I'm helplessly at your mercy, not being able to see through the door."

"It's really I," I said.

"Well, then, do you know, you've had an inspiration. The arrival of a kindred spirit is just what I've been longing for. Only I didn't dare to *hope* for it; and now is seems too good to be true. There! I don't believe it is you, after all."

"Who do you think it is, then?"

"Ah, now I'm sure. Yes; its your voice, your own liquid accents. Oh, it's too delightful! Do you know, I was going over to your shop this evening, just on purpose to see you. I was really."

"I hope you won't let that good resolution be shaken by my coming here."

"Oh, how nice of you! Very flattering! *Bocca, bocca bella!* But I don't know. You see, it's this way. I was up all night composing a little melody, writing a little verse; and I wanted to try its effect on you. You'll give me your honest opinion, won't you? You must bind yourself to that beforehand. Let no false kindness temper your expression. It's the best thing, by all means the best thing, I've ever done: a master-piece, *in parvo*, destined to live till the trump of doom. That's what I think to-day, mind. That's what one always thinks when one's latest production is still warm. To-morrow it will be cold. Then I shall probably recognize it as just one failure more. Agony! You shall anticipate my to-morrow's judgment for me, eh?"

"Are you going to perform it at me from behind closed doors?" I asked.

"Oh, now, how unkind you are!" he grieved. "So heartless! How can I open the door? I—I've just got out of bed. I'm not presentable. It wouldn't be proper. It would compromise me so. Oh, dear, what shall I do?"

In the face of a practical emergency, Armidis always assumed the helplessness of a big child: partly, I think, for the sake of the drollery of it, but partly because he really was, when it came to practical matters, simply a great, big, overgrown baby.

"You might go and dress," I suggested. "I'll wait here on the landing."

"Oh, will you really? Oh, how good you are! So much obliged! Forgive what I said about your being heartless; it was said in the stress of passion; I never meant it. I'll not keep you five minutes. *Seulement le temps d'endosser une robe de chambre.* Shall—shall I throw you out something to read? You could turn your back, you know, and I could lay it out on the floor."

"No, thanks. I don't want anything to read. Now go."

Presently the door was opened, and Armidis stood before me, all smiles, and held out both of his fat dimpled hands in welcome—hands just like a baby's, only bigger. From throat to foot his tall and robust figure was wrapped in a flannel dressing-gown, of a soiled and faded, but still sufficiently flamboyant scarlet.

"Come!" he cried. "Come in. *Soyez la bienvenue.* I see you're admiring my costume. I look like a cardinal in it, don't I? It was given me by Marvellac, the painter. I always put it on when I compose sacred music. Not that I've been composing sacred music to-day, though; *tutt' altro;* very profane. But I thought you'd enjoy the color, and take it as a compliment. Come—this way—in here."

He showed no curiosity to learn the occasion of my visit, but seemed to accept it as a thing quite in the natural course of events.

"*Ecco!* This is my laboratory. It is here that the immortal works are executed."

He preceded me into the untidiest, the most disorderly little room I had ever entered in my life. A vast table occupied the middle of the floor, covered with a wild litter of books, manuscripts, ink-bottles, pens, tobacco-pipes, soiled cups and dishes, crusts of bread, gloves, neck-ties . . . in a word, all manner of related and unrelated odds and ends. The rest of the room was nearly filled up by a grand piano, over the top of which, as well as over the seats of the chairs and every available inch of the floor, were scattered loose sheets of music, pell-mell, as if by the wind. The frame of the looking-glass above the mantel was stuck all round with gaudily-colored cards, which proved upon inspection to be advertisements of the Bon Marché, the Petit St. Thomas, *Vin de Bugeaud*, and various patent medicines. I inferred from its appearance that the room had not been swept or dusted for months and months.

He led me straight to the key-board of his piano.

"Sit down—is the chair high enough?—shall I put a book?—and play it over once, to familiarize yourself," he said, laying some manuscript music upon the support. "Then I'll sing to your accompaniment."

His manuscript was rather blind—indeed, it looked at a rough glance simply like paper spattered over at random with small dots of violet ink—and I blundered a good deal in getting through it; while he stood at the other end of the piano, beating time, shouting out little words of guidance—"Softly," "Faster," "Not so fast," "*Allons donc, plus de feu!*"—clapping his hands now and then to encourage me, and when I committed a particularly brutal error, groaning and writhing in an agony which, though facetiously exaggerated, probably had a core of reality.

When I had stumbled to the end of it, "Oh, murderess! assassin!" he cried. "To mangle the poor child of my imagination under my very beard like that! But, now then! Now, once more! *Da capo.* Smoothly, easily; kindly, discreetly; with confidence, with spirit! Bramble-bush! You have scratched out my eyes! Now, scratch them in again!"

I began, as he bade me, *da capo;* and on this second trial naturally I did better. He walked up and down the room, nodding his head, waving his hand—in fact, marking time with his whole body—and keeping his eyes shut, while an expression of beatitude shone upon his face.

"*Brava! Bravissima!* I forgive you everything. You did it nobly. You have atoned. . . . Well," he declared, "it's not so good as I hoped, nor so bad as I feared. You—you don't think it's altogether bad, do you?" he demanded, eagerly, becoming motionless, and scanning my face as if his life hung upon my answer.

"On the contrary, I like it very much. I think it's charming," I assured him.

"Charming! Did you say charming? Oh, how perfunctory, how banale! Charming, quotha. How undiscriminating! Oh, that is the most unkind cut of all! I never would have thought you capable of calling it charming. What injury have I ever done to you to be snubbed like that? You cruel thing!"

"I'm sorry if the word offends you. I think it is delightful—full of color, passion, imagination. And the harmonies are delicious, and very novel."

"Ah, that is better. Now you see it. The harmonies! Of course! But wait, wait. I will sing it to you. It's meant for a woman, but I'll attempt it all the same. *Tout artiste est un peu femme.* Now! Are you ready! One, two, three; one, two, three! Excellent!"

He sang it to my accompaniment in his wonderful sweet baritone, joining to the technique of a capital executant the fervor and the intelligence of the creative artist.

"And now, Sybil, wise woman, speak. Pronounce its fate."

He appeared to be delighted with the admiration that I expressed, dancing around the room, and insisting, "Really? Really? You're not saying it to please me? You really mean it?" And when I had satisfied him of my sincerity, "Very good! You shall take the consequences of your words. I shall dedicate it to you," he announced. "Dedicated to Monica Paulovna Banakin by her ardent though aged admirer, the Perpetrator! Won't that be fine? Romantic, eh? . . . *Enfin*, it is settled. I throw it off my mind. And now you may tell me, if you wish, to what I am indebted for the unprecedented honor of this visit. I do not attribute it to pure benevolence; the desire to afford me the pleasure of your society. Nothing wrong, I hope, with the Lily of the Field?"

That was his nick-name for my father, who was very punctilious about his dress, who was even, to be frank, a good deal of a dandy; and of whom Armidis—who could never deny himself an opportunity to say a sharp thing, or to do a kind one—had remarked, "He toils not, neither does he spin; yet I'll bet a shilling that Solomon in all his glory couldn't have held a candle to him."

I summoned my courage, told him the story of my father's encounter with Sagoskin, and asked him to lend me five hundred francs.

To my surprise, he took it as a great joke, laughing immoderately, and crying, "Oh, how sweet! How ecstatic! Oh, that Paul Mikhaelovitch! Wasn't it just like him? You know, he solemnly thought he was doing a shrewd, a prudent, even a noble thing. I'll wager he thinks so still. Ah, you Russians are absolutely the most exquisite creations on the face of the earth. Children! Why, for pure juvenility you beat even the Italians. Oh, I wouldn't have missed this for anything in the world. Thanks so very much. Here . . . here is the money."

From the clutter upon his table he fished out a tin box that had once held Egyptian cigarettes; and from the interior of that he took five one-hundred franc notes, and handed them to me.

I began to stammer out some words of thanks, but he cut me short.

"Come, come; time is precious, and I want to show you my smelting works," he cried. "See! Here is a crucible, the common or garden sort that you can buy of any chemist for considerably less than a song. Here is a spirit-stove. Here is a sheet of tinfoil. Now observe. Watch."

He lighted the wick of the spirit-stove, and placed the crucible, with the tinfoil in it, upon the support. In a minute the tinfoil was melted. Then he poured the liquid metal out into a goblet of water that stood near by, and exhorted me to notice the beautiful and grotesque shapes that it took in hardening.

"Isn't it adorable? Isn't it fairy-like?" he pleaded. "Have you ever seen anything so lovely? I pick up and treasure all the bits of tinfoil I can lay my hands on, for the pure joy of doing this. Of course a Philistine wouldn't appreciate it. But you—I'm sure you do; don't you?"

"And yet you call my father a child!" I laughed.

"Oh, don't, don't," he groaned. "Don't say you think it childish. That would be more than I could bear. Another illusion shattered! Let me retain my respect for you, my faith in you. I have felt drawn toward you, I have felt an affinity for you; I have taken you to be a pure idealist, strictly inconsequential, like myself. Don't be logical, don't demand a reason for things; I couldn't bear it, really. Understand that if I had a reason for it, I wouldn't do it; the joy would be poisoned, the zest destroyed. . . . But there! You belie yourself. You were dissembling. You were only making believe. Your secret heart thrills with the rapture of it as keenly as mine does. *Enfin*, I will see you this evening at the Concombre Rose. Good-by."

The Concombre Rose was the restaurant in the Boulevare St. Michel, where we dined.

I found that it was past four o'clock when I left Armidis. To be punctual at home, therefore, and to spare my father the anxiety of waiting for me, I committed the extravagance of a cab.

"Ah, it is you," he said looking up from his writing-table, as I entered the room. "Well, do not interrupt me now. I am in the middle of a paragraph. I will speak with you presently."

"But you wanted to put the money into Serge Petrovitch's hands before five o'clock. You will have barely time to do so, if you start at once."

"Hush, hush; you disturb my train of thought. An hour later, more or less, will not matter."

Armidis kept his promise to meet us at the Concombre Rose—which was rather surprising, for he could never be counted upon to remember a promise of that nature—and my father, who had seen Sagoskin, and paid his debt, was in such high spirits that he insisted upon ordering a bottle of champagne, in which to pledge the friend who, he said, had come to the rescue of his honor. Afterward, he invited us to go with him to the Odéon, where they were playing *La Vie de Bohème.* But Armidis was considerate enough to decline; so, instead, we went to our rooms, and spent the evening over the piano.

After our guest had left us, when we were on the point of separating for the night, "Ah, Monica," sighed my father, "if you had only asked him for a thousand! You see, he thought nothing of it. He is so good-natured. It is as well to get in debt for a sheep as for a lamb. And with that capital to start with, who knows what I might have won? Sagoskin offered to give me my revenge to-morrow. He even offered on the spot to throw the dice, and make it double or quits. He could not conceal his astonishment when I declined. I would rather die than let him suspect that my true reason was poverty. You see, you have made a mistake. After this, let me trust, you will be guided by one who is older and wiser than yourself. . . . Kiss me good-night."

IV.

And now, of course, the question that I had to face was this: How am I to pay our debt to Armidis? By what means shall I be able to save five hundred francs?

Not an easy question to answer, because, in the first place, our actual living expenses swallowed up every penny that I could earn, and, in the second, we were already living as economically as it seemed possible for two people to do who desired at least a show of decency, if not of comfort. I knew that Armidis would not be an importunate creditor, that indeed he would be the most lenient; I was sure that he would give me plenty of time, that he would let me pay him little by little, in instalments; but all the same, the fact remained that we owed him five hundred francs, and that somehow, some time, our scores must be cleared. It came to this: either I must try to increase my earnings, or to diminish our expenses, or I must do both. How to increase my earnings I could not think. In what way, then, could we lessen our expenses?

The first item in which it appeared to me that a reduction would be feasible was that of rent. As I have said, we had two communicating rooms on the fourth story. For the larger of the two, which my father used as a bedroom and study, and which we used in common as a sitting-room, we paid fifty francs a month. For the smaller of the two, my bedroom, we paid thirty-five. It occurred to me that I might be able to arrange with Madame Pamparagoux, our landlady, to let her give me a smaller room still, perhaps up another flight of stairs, for a lower price. Madame Pamparagoux was a warm-hearted Méridionale, a brave and honest woman. She said at once that she could let me have a little room on the top story, looking into the court, for twenty francs a month. Thus a monthly saving of fifteen francs could be effected at a single stroke—not a very big saving, certainly, but decidedly better than nothing. Then I could give up the piano, which—feeling that if I aspired to gain our livelihood as a teacher of music, I must devote what time I could to practising, and so keep myself efficient—I had hired for ten francs a month. Finally, perhaps I could spare from two to three francs weekly by walking to and from my lessons, instead of taking the omnibus. But altogether I could see no prospect of my being able to put aside more than thirty or thirty-five francs a month; and at that rate, it would take me about a year and a half to get quits with our friend. . . .

In truth, it was a dear experience, that little turn at *Zinkalinka*, whereby my father had hoped to contribute something to the support of his family.

I say that I despaired of managing to increase my earnings; and this was because already every hour of my day was occupied, and I had not a moment of leisure in which to undertake additional work. You see, besides what I did for remuneration, I had many duties of a domestic nature to perform. For example, I had to mend my father's clothes, and to make as well as mend my own. I had to brew the coffee in the morning, to go to market, to cook our mid-day breakfast, to wash the dishes, etc., etc. On the whole, I was as busy as, with the natural limitations of time and of human endurance, I could well be.

When, however, I told my father of my determination to change my room, and to give up my piano, he protested that he would not hear of it.

"As for your piano, it is your tool, it is the implement of your profession," he urged, not without reason. "It is senseless, your intention of doing without it. You would kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. And as for your plan of moving upstairs—my child, you do not consider the proprieties. Aside from the fact that I cannot consent to let you make yourself so uncomfortable—by sleeping, *parbleu*, in a room that is no bigger than a closet, and which is as black as night even at high noon, looking as it does into that narrow court—aside from all that, you must remember that you are a young girl, and that it would be unseemly to the last degree for you to go so far away from me, your father and natural protector, especially in an *hôtel meublé* like this. No, we must not be separated, above all at night. As for your indebtedness to Armidis—it is a matter for the future."

"Yes. But I must prepare for the future in the present."

"O, piff! You know perfectly well that he will not press you; on the contrary, he will give you all the time that you can possibly desire. What is it? Five hundred francs? The merest bagatelle. It is a matter for the future. As you are aware, I refuse to regard our present straitened circumstances as other than purely temporary, arising from an absurd misunderstanding on the part of the authorities in Russia. I am in correspondence with various influential friends of mine there, to the end of causing a statement of my case to be laid before the Emperor in person. Of course there are inevitable delays, legal formalities, bureaucratic obstructions, and so forth and so forth; but eventually these will be terminated, my affair will arrive, and I shall be reinstated in the possession of my properties, if not in all my rights and privileges as a loyal member of the Nobility. Then I will enable you to return this trifling sum to Armidis with interest, if you please, at the rate of *cent per cent.*"

"It is not interest that Armidis wants, my father; and for the rest, here are four years already that you have been hoping from day to day to see justice done you by the Emperor. It may easily be four years more before your hopes are realized. We must not keep Armidis waiting for four years."

"Well, then, think of this. I hold a ticket of the value of twenty francs in the Royal Italian Lottery. The drawing takes place in a fortnight. I may be a winner to the amount of a million francs."

"Yes, but by your law of chances, what is the likelihood that you will?"

"Ah, it is impossible to reason with you. At all events, I hope you recognize that this difficulty is one of your own creation. If you had obeyed your father, and asked Armidis for a thousand, instead of that beggarly five hundred, we should to-day be quits with him, and have a comfortable sum in hand besides."

"What is the use of going back to that?"

"To impress the ill consequences of your disobedience upon your mind, my child. But now enough. I will tell you what I will do. Rather than allow you to carry out the quixotic plans that you have in mind, I will humiliate myself so far as to write to my cousin Ogareff, at Moscow, and ask him to lend me the money."

"Borrow from Peter to pay Paul! *A quoi bon?* It is simpler for me to move upstairs. I assure you I shall not mind the change. The room up there is quite as good as the one I have down here, only it is a little smaller. And although it looks upon the court, it is so high up that it gets plenty of light. Besides, I shall never be in it, except to sleep. All the rest of the time, when I am at home, I am here in this room with you."

My father took my chin between his hands, and looked me curiously in the face.

"Where do you get your obstinacy, I should like to know," he said. "Not from me, that is very certain. I can be firm, firm as a rock; but I cannot be obstinate. When I discover in your face the expression that is there at this moment, I recognize that to reason with you will be futile. Very well, then, I submit—only, with this reservation. It shall not be you who will move upstairs; I will do so. You will move in here; I will move up there; and thus the affair will arrange itself to our mutual satisfaction."

But there was one insurmountable objection to this plan; namely, my father had a predisposition to bronchial trouble; and the doctor had told him that he must always sleep in a room that had the sun during the day; and the little room upstairs, looking toward the north, had no sun; while the room downstairs, looking toward the south, had the sun almost from the time it rose until it set. This objection I at last persuaded my father to admit, and give way before.

Accordingly, on the first of the next month, I took possession of my new quarters; and on the same day the men came to remove our piano—which, I confess, I could not see them do without a sinking of the heart.

A few evenings later Armidis called upon us. I happened at the moment of his arrivel to be alone. My father had stepped out to buy some cigarettes.

Looking into my eyes with a smile that was at once quizzical and reproachful, wagging his great white head at me, and shaking his finger, our visitor began to drawl, in his most plaintive accents, "Oh, you wicked creature! I've found you out. So fair, so guileless-seeming, yet already a past mistress in iniquity! Oh, you whitened sepulchre, you generation of vipers!"

"Why, what have I done?" I asked.

"All night long," he went on solemnly, without noticing my question, "I lay awake thinking of your dreadful wickedness. It's been a shocking blow to me. One more illusion shattered. One more idol cast from its base. Oh, you heartless thing! You fair-spoken villain! You premature mass of sophistication!"

"But, really, what have I done?" I repeated.

"Oh, don't, don't," he expostulated, grievously. "Don't add hypocrisy to your other vices. Don't look me in the face, and pretend not to know. All night long I had you on my conscience; I couldn't close my eyes, for the thought of how demoralized you were. At last I said, I will go to her, I will speak to her, I will labor with her, not in anger but in sorrow, and try to move her to repentance and amendment. But the hard, cynical, burglarious gleam in your eye disheartens me. I'm afraid you're past regeneration. The way you brazen it out! G-give me a glass of *eau sucrée*."

His voice broke in the travesty of a sob.

"I haven't the remotest idea of what you mean, you know," I said, as I went about preparing him a glass of *eau sucrée*. His sweet tooth, by the way, was one of Armidis's peculiarities. He always carried a box of sweetmeats in his pocket, just as another man would carry a packet of cigarettes. But for that matter, he carried both. When he wasn't munching a caramel, or drinking *eau sucrée*, he would certainly be pouring voluminous clouds of smoke from his nostrils.

Again he paid no heed to my protestation. "How could you do it? How ever could you do it?" he exclaimed. "It's past my understanding. Only let me tell you this, you cruel, heartless, conscienceless thing—don't you ever try to come your grand airs of innocence and benevolence over me any more. I've found you out, I know you for what you are—a reg'lar bad 'un. You shameless inhabitant of a fifth-floor back!"

Then of course I knew what it was.

"Why, who told you?" I cried.

He put on an inscrutable countenance; and spoke in a tone of profound mystery: "Never mind, never mind. I'll say no more about it. But the next time that you premeditate a crime, just remember this: remember that the most skilfully conducted murder will out, and that there's no concealing anything from ME. That's all; and here comes your father, your poor, helpless, long-enduring father. It's lucky for you I'm not your father. If I were, . . . !" A threatening frown and gesture completed his sentence.

PART II.

JULIAN NORTH.

I.

There came a day in that first week of April which so fixed itself upon my memory that whenever I have thought of it since it has returned to my mind as vividly and freshly as if it had been yesterday, and yet which, at the time, I had no reason to suspect would count for more in my life than any of the days that had gone before it.

It was the first real spring day that we had had that year. A wonderful soft breeze blew from the south, all warmth and fragrance; the sky was of a tender shimmering blue, while here and there clouds as white and pure as pearls floated in it. The sunlight was like a vapor of gold, in its rich, thick ardor almost palpable. The whole world seemed to sing and quiver in an ecstasy of renewed exuberant life. When you breathed, you were pierced to the quick by an exquisite but indescribable sensation, as if, instead of common air, it were some subtle, heady ether that you inhaled; and your heart was stirred by a multitude of sweet, indefinite regrets and longings, like dim reminiscences or vague presentiments of something very dear, you could not tell what. Joyous forces that had been long asleep in your blood, seemed to awake and go coursing through your veins with turbulent vigor; yet all the while a delicious languor pervaded your senses, so that you felt no desire to do anything but just bide still and exist. It was one of those rare days of early spring when everything, even the vulgarest or most familiar object, becomes wrapped in a rose-colored glamour, when the ordinary noises of the street fall upon your ears like music, and the faces of the passers-by seem to glow with an inner poetic light.

My last lesson that day was from two till three in the Avenue Duquesne, near the Invalides; and when, at a little past three o'clock, I left my pupil, and started to walk home, the day was at the very summit of its glory. The magic of it penetrated and inthralled me. The shabby Rue du Babylone, through which I took my way, seemed like a street in fairy-land; the ragged, dirty children who played in the gutters were like little Loves and Cherubs in disguise. I felt as if I walked on air; my heart was singing, and it was as much as I could do to keep from joining it with my voice, and really singing aloud myself.

"How strange!" I thought. "It is as though some great good fortune had befallen me, I am so happy; yet in reality nothing has happened; everything is just as it was yesterday, just as it will be to-morrow."

I felt surcharged, tingling to my finger-tips, with glad, buoyant vitality, as if I had drunken a deep draught at the very fountain-head of life.

The scarred and blackened front of St. Sulpice glowed all mellow in the sunshine; and the shop-windows of the *chasubliers* round about had somehow lost their accustomed effect of garish tawdriness, and acquired a dignity and richness of their own. Somewhere out of sight a barrel-organ was monotonously grinding forth the aria of *Ai nostri monti*, from *Trovatore;* even over that my illusion extended itself, and it sounded like dreamy, tender music. For more than a fortnight the buds of the trees in the Luxembourg had been swelling and trying to burst; now, this afternoon, the whole garden looked as if it had been sprinkled with a delicate green powder. Through the prim alleys children in black pinafores were chasing each other, and shouting in their delight. The terraces, the water, the façade of the palace, the marble Queens of France, bathing themselves in the sun, made a picture that had an indescribable charm and sentiment, like a scene from a poem. When I came out upon the Boulevard St. Michel, all at once my heart gave a leap and thrill, for the air smelt of the asphalte, and it was like a sudden plunge into midsummer. Almost at the same moment, the sun went behind a cloud; a few drops of warm rain pattered down—not enough to wet anybody, but just enough to spice the air with a keen earthy odor.

The "Boule-Miche" was thronged with people, whom the fine weather had tempted out: soldiers, priests, children with their *bonnes*, hatless shop-girls, and of course the inevitable students and *étudiantes*. Everyone looked happy and good-humored. The doors of the shops and cafés were all open, and in many of them lounged the proprietors or the proprietresses, enjoying the air.

As I entered the Hôtel du St. Esprit, and was about to go upstairs, Madame Pamparagoux darted out of her little box of an office, on the ground-floor, and called after me, "Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!"

"Yes," I responded, turning back.

"I have a piece of news to announce to you. Come in and rest for a minute. . . . *Ah! quelle belle journée, n'est-ce pas? Un vrai soleil du midi!*"

She mixed a glass of water and *sirop de groseille*, which she insisted upon my drinking.

"And what is your news?" I asked.

"I have let your room, your old room. A young gentleman, a young painter, very nice, very handsome, an Englishman, named Norse, Monsieur Julien Norse. I thought you would be glad to know."

"Yes, I am very glad indeed. I should have been sorry if you had lost by the change I made."

That is all. And yet that day was one of the red-letter days of my life.

The next day brought a relapse into winter. The sky was heavy with lowering slate-colored clouds, and a harsh wind blew from the east, and there were occasional flurries of snow.

II.

I AM going to be absolutely frank in this confession: to subdue my pride, overcome my reticence, and tell the whole truth, as well as nothing but the truth. Otherwise it would have no reason for being, it would defeat its own purpose. Therefore I will acknowledge at once what, if I obeyed my woman's instinct, I should deny; namely, that the little piece of news which Madame Pamparagoux imparted to me that afternoon in her office inspired me with a certain amount of curiosity concerning the young English painter who was the hero of it. . . . oh, but a very tame, a very limited curiosity, indeed, *bien entendu.*

Of course I did not betray this to Madame Pamparagoux. My feminine nature, perhaps my human nature, prompted me to assume a perfect indifference, and withheld me from asking a single question. Yet all the same, I presently surprised myself speculating about him. . . . though in a quite mild and passive way.

"*Un jeune monsieur, un jeune peintre, très gentil, très beau, un anglais, nommé Norse, Monsieur Julien Norse.*"

Such was the description she had given of him. I found my imagination busy trying to construct a theory of him from these meagre hints. What would he be like? I remember I said to myself, "I shall probably see him some day, on the stairs, or somewhere; and then I shall know. But Norse? Julien Norse? It doesn't sound like a very English name."

That is honestly as far as my curiosity about him went at first.

But my father was more eager and less reserved.

"Let us hope," said he, "that he is a possible person. Our world is so narrow, any respectable man or woman would be a welcome addition. I must avow, I suffer from the monotony of our life. I *ennuie* myself profoundly. A new face, a new voice, mind, point of view—it will give us a new sensation, a new interest. He is an artist, and he is an Englishman; both of which facts are in his favor. I will leave my card upon him. Eh?"

"I wouldn't if I were you," I said.

"And why not? You are the one who always says, 'No, don't let's.'"

"Well, at all events, I would wait until we have seen him, until we have formed some notion of his style. He may be, you know, like our other neighbors, quite out of the question."

"But Madame Pamparagoux describes him as . . ."

"Oh, Madame Pamparagoux! Her standard is so different to ours."

"True, true. Ah, well, we will leave it to time, we will leave it to Destiny! *Che sarà sarà.*"

Many days passed, however, and he still remained but a name to us. My father would occasionally hear him, early in the morning or late at night, moving about his room; but for the rest, he did not manifest himself in any manner.

"That young man in the next room to your father's, how he works!" cried Madame Pamparagoux, once when I met her in the vestibule. "He has his coffee every morning at seven, and leaves the house before eight. He works all day at Julien's, and never comes home before midnight. He burns his candle at both ends. Some day he will be sorry."

At another time, as I was passing through the hall, she ran out of her little office and exclaimed, "*Tenez, Made-*

moiselle ! It appears that M'sieu' your father has made a conquest. That young man in your old room, the young English painter, Monsieur Norse, to day he asked me, 'Who is the superb old gentleman I have just passed upon the stairs ? He has altogether the air of a *grand seigneur*, with his noble carriage and magnificent head. I should like to paint him. What a Bayard he would make !' "

My father did not disguise his pleasure when I reported this compliment to him.

"Something tells me that we shall like the young fellow," he said.

But he protested that he could not remember having passed any young man upon the stairs.

Then for nearly a week my father was confined to the house by an ugly cough, and every evening I went alone to the Concombre Rose, and had our dinner packed up in a basket, which I brought away, to be eaten in our room.

One evening—I being rather later than usual—a young man left the restaurant at the same moment with myself. When I reached the Hôtel du Esprit, behold . . . the same young man entered it after me. I heard his footstep behind me on the stairs. As I had my hand upon the knob of my father's door, the young man passed me, and went into the next room.

"So! That is he. That is our young English painter," I said to myself.

"Well, and what does he turn out to be like?" demanded my father, when I had told him of our chance encounter.

"He is sufficiently well-looking, though scarcely handsome, as Madame said. He is tall and strongly built, but he stoops a good deal. An intelligent face, nose rather aquiline, deep-set eyes, whose color I could not distinguish, though they had the effect of dark brown or black, dark complexion, and dark brown hair, mustache, and beard, the beard being trimmed to a point."

"S-s-s-s!" my father hissed, impatiently. "You give me a catalogue of material details which signify nothing, being disorganized, unsynthesized. What do I care for the color of his eyes, the shape of his beard? Does he look pleasant? Does he look interesting? Does he look possible? Is he of our kind? Or is he insipid, commonplace, vulgar, like the others?"

"Oh, no, he doesn't look insipid, and by no means commonplace or vulgar. He looks interesting, yes; and refined. He has an air. He looks clever, and like . . . well, a gentleman, in short."

"You are very unsatisfactory. I am surprised that, inheriting as you do excellent powers of observation from me, you should be so little able to convey your impressions to another mind. I do not obtain the faintest conception of him from all that you have said. I despair of doing so; therefore you need make no further attempt to describe him, but tell me in one word whether he struck you as a man it would be agreeable for us to make a friend of?"

"He struck me as a promising person, a man who would have something to say, yes."

We had naturally spoken to Armidis of our neighbor, and he had joined in our conjectures anent him with a vivacity that was characteristic of his fresh, childlike temperament.

"But," he said, "the fun of it all is that he is just ten times as curious about you as you can possibly be about him. He's just dying to make your acquaintance, poor young man, and he can't think how to set to work. Of course Madame Pamparagoux has turned herself inside out. A Russian nobleman in exile, suspected of Nihilistic affiliations, and a lovely Russian girl, his daughter. The other fellow, the constant visitor, with the peachy complexion, the white hair, the bland smile, that is Armidis —yes, Armidis the composer, whose songs you know and admire. Is it romantic, at least? Does it appeal to the imagination? Then he's been struck by your appearance, remember. Who is the superb old man? A Bayard, *parbleu!* And the young woman, ah! the young woman with the eyes, and the skin, and the hair! . . ."

I tried here to interpolate a sarcasm to the effect that these were very extraordinary possessions indeed; but Armidis hurried on without heeding me. . . .

"He's a painter, a painter mind you. Therefore he has the artistic temperament, he has a soul for color. He would give his right hand to know you. He is at his wits' ends to find a method of attack. Why? Why can't he come up and scrape acquaintance with you without preliminaries? Oh, because this is such a horrid, self-conscious, stupid, cut-and-dried, conventional world. We haven't the courage of our instincts, of our natural spontaneous impulses. We are the slaves of tradition; we wear our ceremonies like fetters. We daren't be ourselves. Ugh! It is heart-rending."

A few evenings later we had just established ourselves, Armidis, my father, and I, in our regular places at the Concombre Rose, when Mr. Julien Norse came into the restaurant, and took a seat at a table at the opposite side of the room.

"There he is," I announced in an undertone. "That is he."

"*Tiens!*" cried my father, looking over at him with all his eyes.

"Oh, no, not really," protested Armidis. "How can you seek so to practise on our ignorance?"

"But it is, really," I insisted.

"Oh, but then, cruel! What did you want to libel the poor young creature for? You told us he was English."

"Why, but so he is."

"Oh, no, never, never. He's never a Briton. He may be a Russian, or a Frenchman, Turk, or Prussian, but he's not an Englishman. He hasn't the English cut at all. Not the English physiognomy, nor the English way of moving, nor the English anything. *Moi, je connais ça comme ma poche, vous savez.* Heartless wretch! You might as well tell us he's Chinese."

"But Madame Pamparagoux . . ."

"Tut, tut! Don't Madame Pamparagoux me! How dare you? Her effrontery, *pardieu!* Madame Pamparagoux, indeed! As if I don't know! Intimidation! . . . However, the slander shall be nailed. I'm going over to ask him. I shan't allow him to rest under any such imputation. At least I shall afford him an opportunity to clear himself. Fair play! At the same time I shall say, 'Look here, my fine fellow, you're dying to know the Banakins, and the Banakins are dying to know you, especially Mademoiselle, who pines for an interesting man. *Allons*, let us put an end to this strained and ridiculous, not to say pathetic, situation. Let us emancipate ourselves. Come with me. I will present you. You shall finish your dinner at our table.' . . . He will want to hug me."

He rose to his feet, as if to carry out his threat.

"If you do anything of the kind," I said between my teeth, "I will kill you."

He flung me a defiant laugh from over his shoulder, and to the unspeakable consternation of my father and myself off he went, with a comical mincing gait, straight across the room to the table of the young man, where he boldly sat down and began to talk. As he talked the young man first looked puzzled, then he smiled, then laughed outright, finally got up, and next moment he and Armidis were bearing down upon us, arm in arm.

I felt as if my cheeks were afire.

"Allow me, Mr. Banakin, Miss Banakin, to present Mr. Julian North," said Armidis, with a grand flourish. "It's been a chapter of sad misunderstandings, from the first. And all because you would accept the testimony of an incompetent witness. Let it be a lesson to you. Julien Norse, forsooth! And English into the bargain! Oh! dear, what is the world coming to? Mr. North is an American, a free born American, and he is shameless enough to glory in it. Madame Pamparagoux! . . . Do you know"—he addressed the young man, but he pointed to me, shaking his fat forefinger—"Do you know, she tried to bully and cower me into admitting that you were English. Fancy! As if I couldn't tell! Oh, she's capable of anything, anything. Sit down. Here comes your soup."

Poor Mr. North looked rather embarrassed, but he managed to make a sufficiently graceful bow, and then to deposit himself in a chair. There was a moment of silence—awkward enough. But Armidis terminated it by beginning to laugh—his merry, musical, contagious laughter. We all laughed. We had almost a *fou-rire*. It was a good thing. It cleared the air.

"We are very glad to know you, Mr. North," my father said. "If you are from America, no doubt we have acquaintances in common. For ten years, I had an American instructress for my daughter, a most talented and accomplished woman, one Miss Goodale—Miss Laura Goodale. Perhaps you know her, or her family?"

"No," returned Mr. North, taking the question, which seemed to me rather far-fetched, with the most respectful seriousness, and speaking with an air of deliberation, "I cannot remember anybody of that name. But perhaps—perhaps we come from different parts of the country."

He had a singularly sweet voice, and scarcely any American accent; but he spoke with a slight hesitation, not quite a drawl, as if he might at one time have been troubled with stammering, but had cured himself.

"She came from Boston," said my father.

"Ah, yes, I come from New York."

"Of which Boston is a suburb, no?"

"It would make a . . . well, then, a . . . a B . . . Bostonian feel very sad to hear me answer yes," he replied.

The difficulty that he had with the B of Boston confirmed my impression that he stammered a little.

"Are you to be long in Paris?" Armidis inquired.

"Six months or so. I have been here three years and a half already, and I came to stay four."

"Oh, then you are an old Parisian; and we thought you had just arrived. Human error!"

"I have just changed my lodgings, that's all. I was at the Hôtel de Carthage, Rue Gay-Lussac, but I had a misunderstanding with the landlady, and had to move. I've been dining here at the Concombre Rose these two years on and off. I have often seen you here, and wish . . . well, then, wish . . . well, then, wished that I might know you."

When he hesitated in his speech, it was his habit to help himself over the rough place by repeating "well, then," until he could go on. I don't know why, but the effect of his half-stammer was somehow pleasant.

"Oh, dear," sighed Armidis, "what a contrary world! Two years lost irrecoverably! Why—why didn't you come up and speak to us?"

"I never should have dared."

"*De l'audace, de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace!*" cried Armidis. "Consider me."

"Yes . . . but . . . *pas trop d'audace*," rejoined Mr. North.

"Well, his impduence!" exclaimed Armidis, drawing himself up with mock resentment, and appealing to my father and me. "I like that. *Trop d'audace*, indeed! To snub me in this public manner!"

"I have, as you see," confessed Mr. North, "a great talent for . . . . well, as the French say, for putting my foot in my plate."

This set us all off laughing again. When sobriety was restored, my father took the word.

"You had in mind, no doubt, Mr. North, the inscriptions over the three gates of Busyrane," he suggested.

"No. What were they?" the young man wondered.

"They are quoted somewhere from Spenser by your American writer Emerson. Over the first gate it was written, Be bold. And over the second gate, Be bold, be bold, and evermore be bold. But then, over the third gate, Be not too bold!"

My father made his little point with great gusto, and in his stateliest, courtliest manner, punctuating it with a bow. I could see that the young man looked at him with admiring eyes, and listened to him with deference; for all which I liked him none the less. My father, perceiving the same thing, was encouraged to continue. . . .

"In happier days, sir, when I found my dearest occupation and distraction in my library, I was equally an earnest lover and an industrious student of the works of your immortal Emerson. I even translated some of his poems, most inadequately, into the Russian language. But nowadays, alas, I have little time for such pleasures. My daughter and I are both, in our respective paths, condemned to take part in the struggle for existence.

You must know that we are unfortunate enough to be in exile."

"Yes, I know that; and I hope . . ." He hesitated, and colored up . . . "I hope you will let me say that I honor you for it. It seems to me that no decent man could help being a Nihilist, if he lived in Russia."

"Look out! Where is your foot now?" cried Armidis, laughing.

"A Nihilist?" my father repeated, at the same time. "Oh, no, let us hope not. I should like to explain to you . . ."

And he seized the occasion to set forth in some detail his differences with the Nihilists, or Revolutionists, and to explain the causes of his own residence abroad.

"All the same," said Mr. North, when he had done, "if you will allow me to say so, I think I should be a Nihilist, if I lived in Russia. I could not take a reasonable or philosophic view of things, if I lived in Russia. I had a friend here in Paris, a Russian, a sculptor—he's dead now, poor fellow; died of consumption—who prejudiced me a good deal. It was a long story, but the point of it was this. When he was a lad, fifteen or sixteen years old, his mother was . . . well, then . . . his mother was . . . well, then . . . flogged to death, by order of the Governor, or chief man, or whatever he is called, of the district where they lived. I'm sure I should be a Nihilist, I should be for exterminating the whole tree, root and branch, if I lived in a country where they do things like that."

"Oh, how horrible, how horrible!" I cried, involuntarily.

"My opinion sums itself up in three words," said my father. "It is worse than futile to fight the Devil with fire. You cannot overcome evil with evil. Things are wrong in Russia; that, unfortunately, must be admitted;

but dynamite, terrorism, anarchy, are equally wrong; and two wrongs do not make a right."

"Oh, goodness, gracious me!" expostulated Armidis, grievously, writhing in his chair. "When are you going to finish? I've stood it in silence just as long as I can. So horrid! Such a shocking subject! What have we done to deserve it? And at dinner, too! When we ought to forget that there are such things as pain and evil in the world. Do let's talk of something else. Let's smoke: smoke's a disinfectant. Here—here are cigarettes." While he held out a paper of cigarettes with one hand, he dropped five lumps of sugar into his cup of black coffee with the other. "What shall we do to recover our frivolity? Let's—let's go over to my rooms and have some music."

To this proposition, after some little debate, we assented unanimously; and, as the evening was mild, we proceeded to the Avenue de la Grande Armée on the roof of an omnibus. Having seen us comfortably established in his work-room, Armidis begged us to excuse him for a little, alleging that he had to go out to make a few *emplettes*—it was a favorite word of his; I never knew him to use the English, purchases.

"What a joy he is," said Mr. North, after he had gone. "I don't know when I met anybody so . . . so *invraisemblable*, or so fascinating."

"*Invraisemblable!* It is exactly the word for him," cried my father.

"What's more, he's as good and kind as he is surprising and entertaining," said I.

"Oh, for that— *pas mal*," my father acquiesced.

"Of course," Mr. North went on, "I've known him by reputation this long while. Everybody knows his music. But the man himself is an experience. I had always supposed he was French, or something. The name sounds so—Victor Armidis. Yet he turns out to be an Englishman."

"Half English, half Greek," I explained.

"However, he is more English than anything else," put in my father. "He was born in England, and educated there. He has never lived in Greece; I doubt if he has ever even been there. Of late years he has spent most of his time in France and Italy. But he is really of no nation, of no class or variety. He is *sui generis.* A freak of nature. What you call a sport, a spontaneous variation. He prides himself upon acknowledging no fatherland, upon being a citizen of no country, a subject of no throne. I remember once I quoted to him in jest those lines of Sir Walter Scott—

'Breathes there a man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said,
  This is my own, my native land?'

whereupon Armidis instantly responded, 'Yes, I am that man.'"

"I'm sure I never can thank him enough for coming up and speaking to me this evening," said Mr. North.

"Oh, his *sang-froid*, his impudence, is unrivalled," observed my father. "And that was a fair specimen of it. I should be curious to learn how he excused himself to you."

"Why, that was just the beauty of it. He didn't excuse himself at all. He simply sat down at my table, and said quietly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, 'Good-evening. Hadn't you better come and sit with us? It's bad for the . . . bad for the . . . well, then . . . the digestion to eat alone. My companions—you know who they are, your neighbors. As for me, my name is Armidis, Victor Armidis, if you set any store by names. The Banakins will vouch for my respectability, though appearances are against me; or I can refer you to my banker. I see you're an American . . .' Of course I was overjoyed."

At this juncture we were interrupted by the return of our host.

"Well," he demanded, "is there anything left of my character? Or have you talked it all to shreds and tatters? . . . Materials for a supper; we'll be hungry by and by," he added, referring to a basket that he carried on his arm. "Now, you two men," he went on, "are only here as chaperons. Monica Paulovna and I are going to make a joyful noise, but you needn't feel under the slightest obligation to listen. You may talk together, if you like, or you may read. Here's literature," and he threw an armful of books down upon the floor between them.

Then he led me to the piano, and began to sing over various of his recent songs to my accompaniment. After that he sang several other songs, not of his own composition. Finally, at his request, I played a little. And so we went on till past eleven o'clock. The two chaperons, meantime, disdained the books that Armidis had offered them, and formed a very attentive audience, giving us the benefit of their comments and applause.

"Now let us sup," said our composer.

He cleared the litter from off his table, sweeping most of it summarily upon the floor, and opening his basket, proceeded to lay its contents out in a row. First came a magnum of champagne; then a paper of sweet cakes and pastries; then a cube of galantine, a loaf of bread, a pot of paté-de-foies-gras, a box of marrons-glacés, and another of assorted bonbons.

After which he left the room for a minute, and when he came back he bore a big tray, covered with knives and forks, dishes and glasses.

"Now, then, to the table," he cried. "And everyone to his taste."

He popped the cork out of the magnum and filled our glasses. . .

Oh, we had a merry supper. We sat over it, talking and laughing, till almost one o'clock. Armidis consumed an incredible quantity of sweets, smoked an incredible number of cigarettes, said an incredible number of amusing things, and imbibed quite half the champagne—dissolving if you please, three or four lumps of sugar in every glass, for which my father called him a heathen, while he plaintively defended himself by saying, "Ingratitude! I go and get *vin brut*, sour enough to melt a Christian's teeth, because I'm unselfish, and I know that the Historian of Russia, being an ascetic, prefers it so; and then he makes faces and snubs me and calls me naughty names, because I temper it to the shorn lamb. Viper!" And all the while his face, with its beautiful bright eyes, its pink and white complexion, and its fleecy hair and beard, glowed like an incarnation of happiness and good-humor.

"I would as soon think of sugaring this galantine," said my father.

"Well, and why not?" retorted Armidis. "I assure you it's very good with sugar."

"Good!" gasped my father. "I believe there is no length to which you would not go for the sake of a paradox. I—I defy you to try it."

"Needless to defy me. I was going to do it anyhow," said Armidis, with perfect coolness. Whereupon he cut off a generous slice of galantine, snowed it over with soft sugar, and deliberately ate it, with every sign of hearty relish.

"It is too much, too much," sighed my father, rising. "After that we must beat a retreat. Who can tell what he may not do next? I cannot feel that we are safe in his abode."

So we put on our things to go home.

"I'll escort you to your door," said Armidis.

And late as it was, he did so. He hailed a Victoria in the street, and in that, while he and Mr. North occupied the strapontin, we were whirled across the town to the Rue St. Jacques.

At our door he asked Mr. North, "Are you in a hurry to go to bed? If not, prithee come and take a walk with me. I for my part, never go to bed till daylight. The day is the best time to sleep; and three or four in the afternoon is the proper time for rising. Let us go for a walk. We will talk over the Banakins."

So while my father and I were climbing upstairs toward our bedrooms, he and Mr. North were walking off arm in arm in the direction of the Boulevard.

III.

Thenceforth we saw a great deal of Julian North. He became, in fact, a member of our little circle. Almost every evening he formed one of our party at the Concombre Rose; then, after dinner, he would very likely go with us for a stroll through the Luxembourg, in the soft spring twilight, and when it got dark, perhaps he would return with us to the Hôtel du St. Esprit, to finish the evening in my father's room. As the season advanced, moreover, we would spend the fine Sundays that came in the country somewhere—at Nogent-sur-Marne perhaps, perhaps in the Bois de Meudon, sometimes as far away as Fontainebleau, sometimes no farther than Suresnes—and it was seldom that Mr. North did not accompany us.

On that first night of our acquaintance the ice between him and myself had scarcely got broken. But only the next afternoon, as I was leaving a house in the Boulevard Haussmann, where I had given my last lesson for that day, whom should I meet almost at the door but Mr. North! And after we had greeted each other, and exclaimed upon the coincidence that had brought us together, it turned out that we were both upon our way home; whereupon he said, laughing, "Really, I don't see but you will have to let me walk with you."

So we walked home together through the lovely spring weather; and as we walked we talked; and somehow we seemed to draw each other out, so that very soon we were talking as eagerly and freely as if we had been old friends. At first we talked of Armidis, and he told me how the composer had kept him up, tramping the streets with him, till four o'clock in the morning, entertaining him with a flow of quaint paradox and whimsical drollery. Then we talked of my father, for whom he professed an enthusiastic admiration, saying that he was the most beautiful old man he had ever seen. Then we talked of Art, discovering upon that theme many ideas, ideals, likes, and dislikes in common; then of Paris, of the Parisians, of France and the French, of our Latin Quarter, of the Hotel du St. Esprit, the Concombre Rose, the manifold pleasantnesses and unpleasantnesses of Bohemia; at last of ourselves.

I remember, while we were speaking of the French, I said that I liked French women very much, but that French men were odious to me. He answered to this, "Oh, no, you are a little unjust. Frenchmen, if you bar out their attitude toward women, are very good fellows. But a Frenchman regards a woman as if she were a piece of bread."

He paused, as if he had finished; and I asked, "How do you mean?"

"Why, first he wants to butter her, and then eat her," he said, which struck me as rather good.

At last we talked of ourselves. By insensible degrees we had drifted to the ground of personalities and confidences; and almost before I was aware of what I had done, I had told him of my work as a teacher, of its difficulties and anxieties, of its compensations, and of my secret aspirations as a musician; while he told me of his work at Julien's, of the studio he shared with two friends in the Boulevard de Clichy—"Whence I had just come when I had the good fortune to meet you," he said—of the picture he had sent to the Salon, and how he hoped it would be well hung, but supposed it wouldn't be, and how if only somebody should be inspired to buy it, he could pro-long his stay in Paris for a while, whereas, otherwise, he would have to return to America in the autumn—"Because then I shall have finished my four years as a Valentine prizeman, and my allowance will come to a deadly standstill, and I must go home to join in the scramble for bread and butter." A certain Mr. Valentine, he explained, had died, and by his will had left a sum of money to establish the Valentine Prize Fund, the income of which was to maintain perpetually four American art-students in Paris, each receiving three thousand francs a year for four years; and every autumn one of the scholarships fell vacant, and was thrown open to competition; and in the competition of 1879 Mr. North had been the winner.

We did not walk very fast; indeed, we sauntered along in a most leisurely fashion, stopping every now and then to look into a shop-window, or to admire some street vista, or some effect of light and shadow, or to watch some of the many tragedies and comedies that are always to be witnessed on the Paris pavements; and thus it took us considerably more than an hour to reach the Rue St. Jacques; and by that time we had quite forgotten that we were mere acquaintances, who had only met the day before.

I remember that when I was alone in my room, after that walk and talk, I felt wonderfully exhilarated and elated, and that I could not help singing as I went about the things I had to do.

We all agreed that our life was fuller and pleasanter for his entrance into it. My father called him a precious acquisition. "I cannot quite make him out," he added. "He has perfectly the manners and the little traits and habits of a man of our own world. In his dress, in his carriage, in a thousand small ways which cannot be defined, though they are unmistakable, as well as in the fine drawing and modelling of his face, he reveals the gentleman, the man not only with breeding and education, but with a pedigree. You cannot make a gentleman in one, two, no, not even in three generations, any more than you can make a gentleman's park. Some centuries are required. This young man is a gentleman in the old, the proper sense of the word. Yet here he is living the life of nothing more nor less than a poor Bohemian art-student; lodging in the Hôtel du St. Esprit, dining at the Concombre Rose, evincing his poverty by a hundred signs. *Ca m'intrigue.* You know I am not romantic, my reason is always paramount to my imagination; yet sometimes, when I observe him, I say to myself, I will lay a wager that this is some *grand seigneur* in disguise."

"They don't have *grands seigneurs* in America," said Armidis; "and as for your sage observations about gentlemen and gentlemen's parks, it seems to me that somewhere in the course of my reading I have once or twice before met with a like sentiment, similarly expressed. . . But North is apparently a very respectable young person, and certainly a good listener, which is more important. He's disgracefully round-shouldered, and he hasn't flesh enough, and he's too enthusiastic, especially on the subject of Whistler's painting, and on that of Monica Paulovna's hair. But his eyes are honest and intelligent, his forehead is well shaped, he has a sweet mouth, and very nice, nervous hands. His voice is pleasant, his suppressed stammer adds a note of pathos, and his accent is singularly decent for an American. He has a good deal of humor, and keenly appreciates my best things. Whether he can paint or not, we'll know when the Salon opens. Meantime, let's enjoy him."

To me, when my father was not present, Armidis said, with a quizzical laugh, "For you, my dear, he'll be a valuable, though probably in the long run a painful experience. Oh, I see how things are moving. Fie, fie!

You pale women with the red hair are the very deuce and all where men are concerned; and those melancholy, artistic, grand-seigneurish fellows, with the pointed beards, are terribly dangerous to female hearts. But I'll thank you to remember that except for me he'd have remained a stranger to you. Poor young thing!"

I paid no attention to Armidis's insinuations. That they might have a soul of seriousness under their appearance of levity, did not occur to me. I liked Mr. North very much indeed. I found him extremely interesting. His stammer, and a certain air of sadness that he had, made me feel sorry for him. And I realized that, until we knew him, there had been a great void in my life, due to my having no friend or companion of anything like my own age, but of which I had not been clearly conscious until now that it was filled. It seemed perfectly natural that in our little party of four he and I should usually pair off together, leaving Armidis and my father to each other.

When the Salon opened we all went with him to see his picture.

"It is on the line," he said, "which is better luck than I ever dared to dream of. . . For the rest. . .?"

He expressed the point of interrogation by a suspension of the voice, a shrug as of resignation, and a glance as of questioning despair.

The title of his picture was *Une Rêverie;* and it represented a woman, life-size, nude, lying at full length upon a tiger skin, a wealth of black hair in disarray over her shoulders and down her breast, a half emptied demitasse of coffee at her elbow, a yellow-covered novel laid face downward on the floor at her side, with her right hand resting on it, and between the pink fingers of her other hand a light cigarette, while from her lips a delicate stream of smoke wound upward, and her eyes followed it with an expression of dreamy, sensuous languor. It was painted in the most advanced realistic manner, with a broad, free stroke, very vigorous, very effective; the drawing was faultless, the flesh full of life and blood, the atmosphere so palpable, so warm and humid, that it never suggested itself to you to think, "She would be cold."

"Your technique deserves all praise," said my father. "Drawing, modelling, coloring, textures, values, are irreproachable. But, if you will permit me to be frank, I do not like your point of view. Mark that I find no fault with your subject—a nude woman, lazily enjoying herself with her novel and her cigarette, is a perfectly good subject—only with the point of view from which you have treated it. It is too material, too literal, it lacks that spiritual note which should always be present in art. It represents life, but it offers no criticism upon it."

"Tut, tut?" cried Armidis. "Heresy! The point of view is right. Criticism of life! Philistine! Bourgeois! . . . Kindred spirit, brother Pagan, accept the hand of fellowship."

He shook the painter by the hand.

"I regret but one thing," he went on, "and that is your title. Your title is literary, it suggests a story, and is therefore to be deplored. However, I forgive you that offence, if you will never do so any more. The treatment, if you will permit *me* to be frank, is very fresh and discriminating, but a little, just a little, young. It may receive an honorable mention; you see they have hung it with respect; it could not be better hung. But if you hope that it will find a purchaser, you are storing up a disappointment for yourself. It is over the heads of the people who buy pictures. They, too, are Philistines. They, too, will demand a criticism of life, a point of view. I see you have French blood in your veins."

"Why, how can you tell that?" Mr. North queried, in manifest surprise.

"Am I blind? How can I tell that you have a nose on your face?"

"Why, do I look French? I never knew that before."

"Look French indeed! Hear him. *Vaniteux!* No, you look like a Yankee of the Yankees—*tout ce qu'il y a de plus Yankee.* But you draw too well. The French twist to your brush. And then no Yankee, no Anglo-Saxon, could have been so inexorably true to his art, could so relentlessly have left the sentimental element out of his picture, the criticism of life, the point of view. No Teuton, in short. The painter of pure Teutonic race must always either preach a sermom or tell a story. You have done neither. You have assimilated the French idea too perfectly not to have a French ancestor somewhere up your family tree."

"How do you account for the fact that the greatest living painter, he who is most strictly and purely an Artist, and nothing but an Artist, happens to be a Teuton, an Anglo-Saxon, and a Yankee?"

"If it were true, I should account for it simply by saying that no rules apply to great geniuses, that Genius by its very nature is an exception to all rules, and a law unto itself. But, my dear fellow, your premises are false; the gentleman to whom you refer is not a Teuton, is not an Anglo-Saxon. He may have a tithe of Anglo-Saxon blood flowing remotely somewhere in his body, but all that goes to his brain is Celtic, which he inherits from his ancestors the McNeills. However, this is trifling. You evade my question. Confess, are you not partially French?"

"Half French," he confessed. "My mother was French."

I thought, as he pronounced that word, mother, his voice softened almost imperceptibly, and trembled a little.

As we were walking home—my father and Armidis leading us by some little distance—he said to me, "I see you didn't like it. I don't wonder. I shall never paint anything in that vein again. Your father was right. It's sordid, it's of the earth earthy. It has no spirit, no significance, no point. You look at it just as you would listen to an anecdote; then you ask, 'Well, what of it? What's the point?' I meant to paint a woman; I realize now that I have painted simply an animal, the female of the *genus homo*. But you see—I don't know whether you will like what I am going to say, but it's the truth—you see, I did it before . . . well, then, before . . . before I knew you. Yes, that is it. Before I knew you. My ideas have changed a good deal since then. I've had some new light."

I made no reply to this speech of his. It embarrassed me; it filled me with a vague uneasiness; yet neither the embarrassment nor the uneasiness was though unpleasant. It was as if he had touched an exquisitely sensitive spot, that tingled at the touch, yet somehow craved to be touched again.

"By Jove," he exclaimed suddenly, "when I tell myself the simple fact, that only a fortnight ago we didn't know each other, had never even spoken to each other—oh, it's preposterous, it's incredible. How mysterious it is, the way years pass, and you live your life in a sufficiently contented fashion, never realizing that there is anything wanting to it, and then one day you meet somebody, in a most casual manner, a lot of sheer accidents having led up to it, and, the first thing you know, that person has become a power in your life, perhaps *the* power, the determining influence, in relation to whom all the meaning and purpose of your life shape themselves! And then you can't realize that you had ever really lived at all before that day. Your former existence has sunken away, into oblivion and indifference, like the months before you were born. All your former ambitions seem so trivial, your former pains and pleasures, hopes and fears, so absurdly petty and insignificant. It's terrifying; because you can't help thinking, What—for instance—what if I hadn't just happened to hit on the Hôtel du St. Esprit, among all the hotels of the Latin Quarter? What if I had gone elsewhere than to the Concombre Rose for my dinner that night a fortnight or so ago? It takes my breath away. How strange it is! I can't help half believing in destiny after all. Why, it's too humiliating to believe that these very most decisive crises in one's existence are the results of pure blind chance, isn't it?"

He said all this rather in the tone of a man soliloquizing, than in that of a man addressing an interlocutor, so again I was spared the necessity of answering. But his words sank into my mind, and many times afterward came back to me, the subject of reflection and speculation.

This much I may say with all truth: that I supposed of course he meant by the pronoun "you" not me alone, but our party, Armidis and my father and myself.

IV.

One evening, in the Jardin du Luxembourg, he told me something of his life before he had come to Paris.

My father and Armidis were seated, smoking and chatting, at one of the tables of the little café; Mr. North and I were walking up and down the terrace by the fountain, within sight of them, but out of hearing. The air was warm and still; the distant, muffled murmur of the town was like a soft under-tone, to which the occasional liquid notes of the birds in the trees furnished a pleasant desultory counterpoint; there was a dim pink light in the sky above the house-tops, reflected from the sunset. I had spoken of my mother, whom I could just vaguely remember, a pale beautiful face smiling upon me in my childhood. Then he spoke to me of his.

She was French, he said; not of France, but of New Orleans, in America—a Créole. In 1858 she had married his father, Eustace North, and left the South to go and live in New York, where her husband was a barrister. . . .

"It was the wildest sort of a love-match. She belonged to a family of the most devout Catholics, while his people were of the sternest sect of New England Puritans. They had to run away together, and it was years before their parents relented, and then they did so only in a half-hearted way. She was eighteen when she married, and scarcely nineteen when I was born. I never felt that she was very much older than myself. She had the gift of perpetual youth, of perpetual girlhood. She died when she was thirty-eight, and I was then almost a grown man."

He said she was not only the sweetest and the gentlest woman he had known in all his life, "With that gentleness and sweetness that are almost peculiar to a certain type of Frenchwoman," but she was also the most beautiful and the most brilliant. . . .

"I used to sit still and look at her for hours at a stretch, just revelling in her wonderful beauty; and I have never heard anyone, man or woman, talk as she could talk; with such wisdom, such wit, such lightness of touch, such simplicity, and yet such warmth and color. She had temperament and imagination. When I would read a story or a fairy-tale, I always thought of the heroine as being like my mother. I loved her not only with the tenderness, the affection, that one naturally gives one's mother, but with an intensity, an ardor, that amounted to a passion, an adoration. She fascinated me, dazzled me. She was like one of my fairy-princesses in flesh and blood. And so kind with it all, so untiringly kind and good to me! . . . Well, then, as time went on, as I grew older, I began to realize that my father, . . . well, then, . . . well, then, hate, . . . well, then, that my father hated me. He had always been very stern and distant with me, and little by little, as I cut my wisdom-teeth, it dawned upon me, it was borne in upon me, that I was hateful to him. He was a very quiet, undemonstrative man, apparently very cold; but it was really a case of still waters running deep, of fire in ice. He had an intensely passionate nature, and he worshipped his wife like a lover, and he hated me as a lover might hate a rival. I came gradually to understand this, and I saw that she knew it too. If he was present, she would hardly notice me, or would do so only *à la dérobée*, when his back was turned, or he didn't happen to be looking.

Then, when he was absent, she would take me to her, and cover me with kisses, and tears, and caresses, as if to make up to me for her neglect. Oh, I wasn't exuberantly happy." . . .

He interrupted himself long enough to roll a cigarette; but when he had finished it, instead of lighting it, he suddenly crumpled it up in his hand, and threw it away. Then he went on. . . .

"She had always been very frail and delicate; and at last she began to keep to the house, and then to her room, and then to her bed. She was fading away little by little. My father used to go about the house, speaking to no one, wringing his hands, and staggering almost as though he was drunk. Oh, it was frightful. Just before Christmas, 1878, she died. . . . I didn't see my father for many days, nearly a fortnight. He hid himself in his bedroom all that time. Then one evening he sent word for me to come to him in the library. He was very pale, and thin, and old-looking; and his eyes—oh, they were terrible, so wild, so desperate. I went toward him, impulsively, with my hands stretched out. But he stopped me. "Only a word, only one word," he said. "I have only one word to speak to you." I waited, and at last he went on. This is what he said to me. He said, "Your mother is dead. You have killed her. Yes, just as certainly as if you had stabbed her, as if you had poisoned her. Why did you ever come into the world, to thrust yourself between her and me, to rob me of her, first of her love, and then of her life? You have killed her. She never loved me after your birth as she had before it; and ever since, she has been failing, failing. She never recovered from the pain you caused her—yes, you! For nineteen years, nineteen years, I, I who loved her, I have had to watch her dying inch by inch—all thanks to you. And now she's dead. Only thirty-eight years old, in the very prime of her womanhood, and she is dead. Oh, you may guess how I love you. . . . Now I want you to go away. I can't bear to see you, to feel that you are in the house. Go away. Wherever you please, only somewhere out of my sight, out of my hearing. I will make you an allowance, as much as you please. Only go. Go, and save me from the necessity of seeing you, of being reminded of you. That is all. That is what I sent for you to say."

Mr. North paused for a moment; then, abruptly, he hurried on. "Of course after that, after he had spoken to me in that way, I had no idea of taking an allowance from him. I had known for a long time that he wasn't fond of me, but I had never dreamed that it was as bad as that; that he held me responsible for my mother's illness; he had never spoken to me on the subject before, and I had only felt in a general way that he disliked me. Now, what he had said rankled. My pride got up, and I was hot with resentment. . . . I was within a year or so of getting my degree at Columbia College; but I'd always wanted to be a painter, and I dare say I had neglected my classics a good deal to work in the studio of an old Frenchman, Monsieur Oudinelle, who was established in New York. So, after that talk with my father, I left college, and went in for painting in deadlier earnest than ever. And in September I was lucky enough to win the Valentine Prize. Meantime my father had written to me, offering to settle an annuity upon me, and I had written back, rather fiercely I am afraid, declining. My pride was still up. Now I wrote him again, just three words, telling him that I was about to go abroad. That letter he never answered. . . . After I'd been here about a year, I received one day by post from New York a document, sealed with a red seal, which proved to be what they call a citation to attend the probate of his will. It was the first intimation I had had of his death. By his will he left all of his property to various charities, all of it, nothing to me. Though, after all, I can't say that I minded that especially; I could have contested the will, you know, and very possibly broken it; but my pride was still up. The worst of it is, I've never been able to get it out of my mind that perhaps what he said was true. I've never been able to get that out of my mind. I see her face, her beautiful, sad face, I see it white and worn with suffering; and then I think, Yes, very likely what he said is true, and I was the cause of it all. My life has been purchased at the price of her broken health and death."

He told me this as we paced backward and forward through the gathering dusk along the terrace that borders the basin of the great fountain in the Luxembourg. It did not occur to me to think it strange that he should be telling it to me; it seemed the most natural thing in the world. After he had done we continued to walk up and down, side by side, for a while, without speaking. He had told his story with an attempt at coolness, even indifference; but it was plain to me that he was deeply moved. My heart yearned out toward him with a strong compassionate emotion, that yet somehow was not altogether sad. It was nearly dark; only a thin streak of dull red, low down in the west, was left of the gloaming. Presently he stood still, and leaned over the stone balustrade that fences the terrace, and looked off across the water. I could see, dark as it was, that he was very pale. I waited at his side, not daring to speak, but longing in some way to be of comfort to him. . . .

Suddenly, he put out his hand, and took mine, and held it for a minute with a gentle pressure. I did not think of drawing my hand away, or of resenting his taking it. It seemed as though the pity for him, pent in my heart, somehow passed out to him at this contact. He held my hand, and pressed it; and it was not till he had released it, that all at once I felt a wild thrill and shock, and the pulses in my temples began to beat so fast and hard, it seemed as though all the strength in my body was drawn to them, and as though I should faint for weakness.

"There! You must forgive me for inflicting my stammering confidences upon you," he said. "Only, perhaps it is as well that you should know me for what I am—a penniless adventurer." He gave a dry little laugh. "I never regretted that money till just these last few weeks. Perhaps you'll think me sordid and mercenary to regret it at all. I suppose your father will be wondering what has become of us. It's got so dark."

Mechanically I followed him back to where my father and Armidis were still seated, at the café. Then all I wanted was to be alone: a great eagerness to get away, by myself, in my own room. Yet at the same time I felt a strange reluctance to part with him, a strange joy in the sense that he was present.

All that night I did not sleep. All night I kept feeling that hand-pressure over and over again; and little things that he had said, and little inflections of his voice, kept coming back to me; and a hundred times I asked myself, "What did he mean? Did he mean. . . . ? Could he have meant. . . . ? Oh, no, that isn't possible. And yet. . . . !"

I was miserable, and frightened, and bewildered, and ashamed, and happier—oh, happier than I had ever supposed a woman could be.

V.

But the next morning brought a revulsion of spirits, a reaction. All my happiness was gone. Only the shame, and the fright, and the misery were left—a horrible chill and faintness at the heart.

"What will he think of me? What will he think of me?"

That question kept ringing through my brain, over and over again, an obsession, like some hateful tune that one has heard, and cannot chase from one's memory.

"He did not mean anything at all. Or even if he did . . . ? It makes no difference. But he didn't. It was simply his desire for sympathy. If it had been anybody else, he would have done the same thing. But you . . . you . . . ! What you did . . . oh! What will he think of you? Oh, I wish I had died, I would rather have died."

When I remembered it—when I went over it in its details, as I was constantly forcing myself to do—it seemed as if at the same time I was freezing and burning up, and I felt as though I should like to sink into the earth for shame. How I had not withdrawn my hand—no, had not made the faintest effort to withdraw it—but had allowed him to hold it just as long as he pleased—until, of his own accord, he had dropped it!

As the day dragged away, and the hour approached nearer and nearer when I knew that I should have to meet him—at the restaurant, at dinner—a great sense of dread began to torment me. From the prospect of meeting him, when I shaped it in my mind, I shrank unnerved and weak, as from the prospect of physical pain.

"I will plead a headache, and stay in my room. I will not go to dinner at all," I said.

And for a little while this plan afforded me a great deal of relief. But then, suddenly, it struck me as of all plans the most foolish.

"No, no! If you do that, it will be like a confession. If you do that, he will know, he will know for certain; whereas now at most it can be only an inference with him, a suspicion, which he cannot be sure is true. No; you must go and meet him, and behave just as though nothing had happened. You—you must brazen it out, as Armidis would say. You must meet him with such nonchalance, you must treat him so naturally, in such an unembarrassed, matter-of-fact, amiably indifferent way, that he will not dare to imagine anything, but will realize that he was mistaken, and that *you* didn't mean anything either, and that it made no impression upon you, and that you simply like him well enough as an ordinary acquaintance, and nothing else at all."

But I felt very nervous, very nervous and ill at ease, as six o'clock drew near. Usually at six o'clock he would rap at my father's door; then we would go on to the Concombre Rose together. Now, at every sound in the passage outside our room, I started, and my heart began to palpitate. "You must be self-possessed, perfectly self-possessed," I kept thinking; and I kept rehearsing in my imagination the manner in which I should accept and return his greeting, the tone in which I must say good-evening, and the way I must let him shake hands with me, if he offered to shake hands.

Five minutes to six . . . three minutes to six . . . six o'clock . . . five minutes past six . . . an eternity to me, waiting from second to second to hear his rap at the door.

"Well," said my father, "I don't believe Mr. North is going to stop for us this evening. It's past six. I don't think we had better wait any longer. We might lose our table. Come."

Then it surprised me to find, much as I dreaded meeting him, that I was decidedly disappointed, when it occurred to me, "What if I should not see him at all to-night?"

We went to the restaurant, and took our seats at our accustomed table. Armidis was already there, lolling back in his chair, smoking a cigarette, and reading an evening paper.

"Ah, better late than never," he cried. "For once in my life I was punctual; and it has taught me the truth of my favorite adage, that punctuality is the thief of time. I've lost five precious minutes waiting for you."

We began our dinner. I could not take my eyes off the door. Every time it opened, my heart seemed to stop beating and stand still, while I looked to see if the new-comer would be he; then, when I saw that it wasn't he, my heart sank with deepened disappointment, as if sick for hope deferred.

Armidis rallied me upon my silence. "Naughty! She just sits still and pouts. *Furibonde!* Because. . . . Never mind. I won't betray you. But I know, I know. Don't look at me with that stony affectation of indifference, of ignorance. Trying to stare me down! Browbeating! Don't hope to hoodwink *me*."

Suddenly I ceased to hear Armidis's voice. My heart had given a great bound, and now it was beating so violently, it seemed to suffocate me; and I felt as if all the blood in my body were burning in my cheeks. . . .

He had come in. He was making straight for us, across the space between the door and our table.

I did not dare to look up, after my first glimpse of him. I bent my eyes upon my plate; my eyelids felt thick and heavy and hot, like curtains of fiery lead. "You must be self-possessed, self-possessed"—the phrase repeated itself to the rhythm of my pulses. Yet I suppose there never was a less self-possessed person in the world.

"Good-evening," I heard him say.

"Good-evening," my father responded. "We had almost given you up."

"We were very dull," said Armidis. "We couldn't do anything but just sit still and pout."

"I was detained at the studio," he explained, "and then the busses were all full and I had to walk."

"If I don't notice him, or speak to him, what will he think?" I was saying to myself. "I must be nonchalant and self-possessed. I must look up and speak."

So, with the intention of giving him a formal little recognition, I looked up. But I had overestimated my courage. His eyes, troubled and questioning, were fixed upon my face. I could not bear them. I had to look down again, forcing myself to murmur a faint good-evening.

And yet I had determined to be unembarrassed, natural, matter-of-fact!

Now I was furious—whether with him or with myself I could not have told: perhaps with both. "Oh, I am a fool, a fool," I groaned inwardly. "Now he *will* think . . . things." How to cover my confusion? How to retrieve that which I had already shown? All at once something seemed to whisper to me, "Talk! Talk to Armidis. Ignore him, and talk to Armidis. About anything, no matter what: only as if the thing you were talking about were the only thing of interest to you in the world."

Then I began to talk to Armidis. My tongue was as if magically loosened. Armidis met me half-way. We tossed the ball backward and forward between us, never for an instant allowing it to rest. My father sat still and listened, enjoying it as though it were a play. Now and then Mr. North would put in a word, but I would never pay the least attention to him. All the while I was conscious that he was looking at me, with that troubled, questioning expression in his eyes. I felt as if I were under the influence of some exciting, stimulating drug—black coffee raised to the tenth power. My cheeks burned, my head whirled; my voice sounded strange to me, in a key higher than its natural one; I was talking not only with feverish volubility, but with feverish gayety, laughing a good deal, with a laugh that seemed to me hollow and artificial: yet I knew that I was talking coherently and reasonably. And through it all, under it all, my heart was full of a dull pain, as if something were gnawing in it to get out.

When we left the restaurant I took Armidis's arm, and he and I walked on ahead, leaving my father and Mr. North to come behind. We went into the Luxembourg.

Armidis said, "You must confess that I'm very nice, the embodiment of complaisance, eh?"

"Of course, you're always very nice. But I don't understand just what you mean by the embodiment of complaisance."

"Oh, yes, you do. I hope you don't imagine that I'm deceived. A mere instrument, a mere tool, a cat's-paw, in your dexterous hands. The weapon of your revenge. I see, I see. Not highly flattering! To be made use of in this way! Another man might resent it. But I'm docile, I'm long-suffering. Only, tell me, what has the poor young creature done? That's my due, I think. If I'm to serve your purposes, as you're compelling me to do, I think it's my due to be initiated into the why and wherefore. I want to know whether it's a holy war. His sins should be as red as scarlet to deserve such treatment as you're dealing out to him. Or perhaps—you have so many divine qualities—perhaps you make it a practice to chasten those you love."

"You are horribly blasphemous, Mr. Armidis; and I haven't the least idea what you mean, or even what you're talking about."

"Fie, fie!" he cried. "Now you've gone too far. Now I must punish you for your shocking hypocrisy and untruthfulness. Retribution! I'll be the avenging angel. I'll teach you."

He halted and turned around.

"Banakin! Banakin!" he called out to my father. Presently my father and Mr. North had come up with us. "I want to talk to you, Banakin, about a little matter, before I forget if. Will you walk on with me? Mr. North can take charge of Monica Paulovna."

Then he and my father went off together, and I was left standing alone with Mr. North.

There was an interval of silence, awkward, painful.

Then, "Shall we walk?" I heard him ask.

"I don't care," I answered. In reality my heart was fluttering with fright and nervousness, but I noticed that my voice sounded ill-natured and sullen.

We began to walk, very slowly. For a while he did not speak.

At last he said, abruptly, "I see that you are angry with me about something, Miss Banakin. I hope you will let me ask what?"

"Angry with you? Oh, no, not in the least."

I forced the words out with an effort. My voice shook perceptibly.

"Well, perhaps that was giving myself too much importance. Anyhow, I've managed to displease you in some way, that's very certain; to get into your bad books. I don't know, I can't think, what it can be. Whatever it is, I wish you would believe that . . . well, then, that . . . that I did it unconsciously. I wish you would tell me what it is."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Mr. North. What right would I have to be displeased with you?"

Again my voice sounded ill-natured, contemptuous, sulky; yet again I was aware of no feeling save fright and nervousness.

"Why, I might easily have done something, without knowing it, in my stupid way—I might have said something, without meaning to—that has annoyed you, or given you offence. I told you the first evening we ever spoke together that I had a talent for putting my foot in my plate. You see, when a man stammers, he's always saying the thing he didn't mean to. He starts out to say something, but then as he approaches the necessary words, and sees them looming up threateningly before him, he very likely gets scared away, and in order to cover his embarrassment he seizes hold of the first easy words he finds at hand, and the result is that he says something quite different to what he started out to say, something that he hadn't in the least premeditated, and something that is sure to be malapropos, and very possibly worse. . . . Well, at all events, it's certain that you haven't treated me this evening with your usual friendliness and frankness."

"Oh, I assure you, you are entirely mistaken," I replied.

"No — excuse me — I'm not mistaken, I can't be mistaken. You've hardly noticed me, hardly spoken to me or looked at me, all the evening. I dare say I deserve it; of course, I must; only, I . . . I'd . . . I'd like to know, for the sake of my own conscience, what I've done. Your good will and good opinion are very precious to me. I can't bear to think that I have lost them. But if I have, why, it would afford me some dismal satisfaction to be told why and how. I should like an opportunity to explain, to make amends. But of course I can't, if I don't know what I've done."

"Shall — shall we walk a little faster, to catch up with my father?" I said.

"There!" he exclaimed. "You wouldn't speak to me like that, when you see how anxious and unhappy I am, unless you were angry with me, unless I had done something to disgrace myself with you."

"Really, Mr. North, you seem to doubt my word. I have told you that I am not angry with you, and that I don't know what you mean. I should think that would be enough."

"Well, but then, will you tell me one thing more? If you're not angry with me, why do you treat me in this way?"

"I'm not treating you in any way."

He was silent for an instant.

"I should hate to believe that I haven't done . . . that I haven't done . . . that I haven't done anything to deserve it," he said at last; "that you are making me miserable in sheer . . . in sheer . . . well, then, in sheer wantonness."

"*Mr. North . . . !*" I cried.

"Oh, there! Now you *are* angry," he groaned. "I forgot myself. I couldn't help it. I suppose it's useless for me to ask your forgiveness for that."

I could not answer him. I felt that suddenly all my strength had deserted me; and I knew that if I tried to speak, or did anything but just hold myself in, I should begin to cry.

"Won't you answer me?" he pleaded, softly, earnestly.

"I was beside myself. I didn't realize what I was saying."

"Oh, don't, don't," I cried. . . . Then, as I felt myself trembling all over, and knew that I couldn't keep my tears back any longer, and that I was going to make a ridiculous spectacle of myself, I was so humiliated and enraged that I said, without really understanding what I was saying, "Oh, I hate you, you make me hate you."

He started and stood still; and though I was half blind with tears by this time, I could see that he winced, and that his face grew pale, and that his eyes filled with pain and terror, as if I had cut him with a knife. He looked at me in a sort of blank anguish for a moment; and then he repeated, faltering, "You hate me? Good God! What—what have I done to make you hate me?"

"Oh, no, no," I moaned, in sudden remorse and alarm. "Don't look at me like that. No, no, I don't mean that. I don't mean that I hate you. Only, why—why do you. . . . Oh, can't you let me be?"

"Oh, heavens, heavens!" he cried, wildly. "What have I done? You are crying. You are miserable. What have I done? What have I said? I must have done something dreadful, to make you cry."

"No, no, no," I sobbed. "You haven't done anything. Only, I—I am such a —oh, I don't know."

I put out my hand, instinctively, to silence him, to entreat him to let me alone. But he must have misunderstood. He seized hold of it, and kept it in his.

"If you would only speak, if you would only tell me," he said, and pressed my hand so hard that it hurt.

"Let go, let go," I begged, pulling it away.

"Is it—is it because of what I said, of what I did, last night?" he asked, all at once. "Because, if it is, I can tell you—of course I ought not to tell you, I have no right to say it to you—only you had better know the truth, rather than imagine things that are not true—what I did last night I couldn't help doing, because—oh, because for one moment I lost control of myself, and my—my love for you, Monica, my love for you—do you understand?—my love for you got the better of me, and I couldn't keep it in. Oh, my Love! You know it now. You know I love you. Love you! Oh, but you can never know how much!"

I thought my heart would burst, it swelled so full with such a deep, unutterable, aching joy.

"Oh, Monica! Monica! Oh, my Love!" His voice was like a sigh, so low, so passionate. Then he took hold of my hand again, and drew me toward him, very gently, very slowly; and then he put his arm around my waist, and kissed me. It seemed as if all my life trembled and thrilled in the breath I drew while I felt his lips against mine.

VI.

AND now there began for me a season of happiness greater than any that I had ever dreamed, a happiness as rich and as complete as it was new: the happiness that must come to every young girl, I suppose, into whose life love has just entered for the first time. Spring was deepening into summer, the wonderful golden summer of France, with its wealth of sunshine and color and fragrance. It was as if somehow, the magic of the summer had got into my heart, filling it with warmth and light, and making it sing.

But, of course, I could not have been happy at all, if he had not been happy too; and I am sure that he was happy, very happy, perhaps as happy as myself: only . . . . Only, his happiness, though it may have been as great as mine, was not so unalloyed. For he could not do what I could do: he could not forget or banish from his mind certain cruel and relentless facts of our position; whereas to me they were, for a while at least, as insignificant as words written in water. He could not help brooding upon them, and reasoning from them to their hateful consequences; whereas I had a blind confidence that by some means or other we should be enabled to triumph over them in due time—a confidence that was simply born of my desire.

One Sunday afternoon we had gone to Suresnes for dinner, and after dinner we crossed the bridge to spend the twilight in the Bois. My father and Armidis were walking so far ahead of us that we could talk together without fear of being overheard. Julian, however, was morose and monosyllabic; it was easy to see that something was troubling him, that he had, as we say, something on his mind.

Then all at once he broke out with a sort of groan: "It's all wrong, all wrong. I have no right to it. I feel like a thief."

I did not know what he meant, and I was frightened.

"What is all wrong? You have no right to what?" I asked. "I do not understand."

"Oh, it's simple enough. No right to anything—to all this happiness, to your love. No more right to it than a thief has to his stolen goods."

"I don't see what you mean. No right? Why haven't you a right? Or how is it a question of right? You can't help it, if I love you. One loves, just as one lives, willy-nilly. You might as well say that you have no right to life."

"Well, I'm not so sure that I have, if it comes to that. But anyhow, the case is different. One can't help loving, if you please; but one *can* help—How shall I say it? One can't help feeling thirsty, for instance; but one can very well help going into a café, and ordering wine, and drinking it, when one hasn't the money to pay for it. Just as surely as people give themselves up to the enjoyment of anything that they haven't a right to, just so surely must they pay for it some time in suffering. It's a law of nature. I shouldn't mind paying, so far as I'm concerned. I should consider any price cheap. But you . . . ! I can't bear to think of the pain we're storing up for you."

"I don't understand that," I said.

"Why, do you realize what I am? A poor devil of a fifth-rate painter, without a penny to his name."

"I dare say I'm very dense, but still I don't understand. Is love a luxury, which one can only enjoy if one is rich?"

"Yes, it is, emphatically. But the point is that our paradise is a fool's paradise. Here . . . We love each other, don't we, Monica? That's given; that's our starting-point. Isn't it? But now look, consider. Unless two people who love each other can marry, their love must sooner or later become just an unmitigated curse. As the world is constituted, if it is absolutely out of the question for them to get married, if there is no prospect of their ever being able to marry, their love is a curse, an agony. Well, what am I? A beggar, literally a beggar, without a sou in the world, without even an honest trade whereby to earn a sou."

"An honest trade indeed! You have your Art."

"Art? Unless a miracle should happen, it will be years and years before I can even earn bread and cheese by my art. Perhaps never. A painter! Why, if I were a house-painter, a sign-painter, our outlook would be more hopeful. Anyhow, it reduces itself to this: we love each other, and there's no likelihood of our ever being able to marry. Therefore, in letting you know that I love you, in accepting your love, in allowing you to care anything at all for me, I'm doing you an injustice of the worst kind, a cowardly, dishonorable injustice. That's the plain English of it."

"In the first place," I replied, "you are just too conceited. Allowing me to care for you indeed! Thank you. And suppose you should forbid it? That's very mannish. And, in the second place, you say: Unless a miracle should happen. Well, and why shouldn't a miracle happen? Hasn't one miracle happened already? Wasn't it a miracle that we ever came to know each other at all? That among the millions and millions of people in the world, we two should just have found each other out? I don't believe that after God has brought us together in this way, He will let us be separated. I am sure that a miracle *will* happen, if it becomes necessary. But in the third place, suppose we can't get married for the present? Aren't we happy enough now? Can't we wait? Oh, I don't see anything to worry about. Sufficient unto the day!"

"*Entre nous le passé ne valait pas le diable, l'avenir sera délectable, en attendant jouissons du présent,*" he said, quoting a favorite maxim of my father's. "That is all very well. You have nothing on your conscience. You're not to blame in anyway. But I—my case is dif . . . different. It's my fault. I'm the criminal. And then, look: the present is going to be so short. It's now June, isn't it? And in September, or October, at the latest, . . . do you realize what's got to happen then? I'll have to pack my traps, and go back to America. Then our fool's paradise will show up for what it is."

"I don't see why you will have to go back to America."

"Why, because I shall be dead-broke. That's slang, and means that I shan't have any more money."

"But you will be no worse off with empty pockets here in Paris, than you would be over there."

"Ah, but here I can't earn a penny, not a single penny. Over there, with the prestige of my four years as a Valentine Prizeman behind me, I can teach. I can probably earn enough to keep body and soul together, if I'm not particular about the quality of the bond. Why, I suppose, if I have good luck, and am industrious, I can earn almost as much as a day laborer—say a couple of thousand francs a year.

"Nonsense! With your talent, with your training! You'll earn a great deal more. Then you will be very economical, you will save; and when you've got a certain amount put by, you will come back."

"Ah, that shows how little you understand the conditions. Art is paid poorly enough the world over, and held in slight enough esteem; but in our great and glorious Republic . . . oh! Barring a handful of millionaires, *parvenus*, ignoramuses, who have made their money in pork or railways, and know as much about Art as they know about Esoteric Buddhism, nobody thinks of buying pictures in our country; and *ces messieurs* will buy nothing that isn't signed with a world-renowned name. In America the artist must teach, or he must starve; and I have never heard of anyone building up a fortune as a teacher. . . . But apart from that, taking it at its best, supposing that I *can* come back some time, the separation will be pleasant, won't it? To be separated . . . who knows how long?"

"Oh, it will be dreadful, horrible. But never mind. I'll wait for you . . . all my life, if necessary."

"Oh, what have I done to deserve such happiness?" he cried. But then his face darkened. "That's just the point. There's just where the wrong comes in. I have no right to make you wait, to let you wait. What right have I to let you waste the very best years of your life waiting for me, when, if you'd never had the misfortune to know me—if your unlucky star hadn't sent me across your path—you might have cared for somebody else, somebody who would have been less impossible?"

"It's outrageous for you to talk like that. As though love were simply a matter of chance," I cried. "As though I could ever have cared for anyone but you. As though I would have given my love to the first comer! I don't see how you can suggest such a thing."

"Oh, I didn't mean that. I only meant. . . But there! What's the use of discussing it? I'm going to believe as you do. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Something will happen. I may not have to go to America after all. Suppose I should sell my Salon picture. Of course, I might as well say, Suppose the moon should fall: but let's suppose it. *En attendant jouissons du présent!*"

Armidis seemed to have divined everything. One day he said to me, "If I were Julian North and Monica Banakin, do you know what I would do?"

"No. What?" I queried.

"I would throw prudence to the dogs."

"As usual, you speak in riddles."

"I do that as a tribute to your intelligence, it's so penetrating. Throw prudence to the dogs. There's nothing so deadly harmful in this world as prudence. It causes more unhappiness annually than scandal, small-pox, and street-music piled together. I once knew a young man—this was hundreds of years ago, before you had even thought of being born—a young man who loved a young girl, and she loved him. Strange as it may seem, hard as you may find it to believe, their love was just as strong and eager, just as burning a reality in their hearts, as Julian North's and Monica Banakin's is; but they hadn't the price of an old hat between them; and they were prudent. So, though it hurt a good deal to do it, they said good-by to each other; and presently she married another man, and died; and he went off, and was miserable all the rest of his days; and he realized that he had ruined his life and hers, and made a pitiful failure of everything, all because he had been so prudent; and though he was never prudent again, it didn't do any good. That first prudence was irrevocable; its consequences followed him always."

I was silent. Somehow, though he spoke in a jaunty, half-jesting tone, what he said sent a pang into my heart.

"I speak to you out of the depths of my age and experience, Monica," he went on. "Give prudence the go-by. 'Tis a strained quality. It falleth as the ruthless hail from storm-clouds. It curses him that gives and him that takes. Eschew it. It's for you to take the initiative. You see, poor youth, he's Anglo-Saxon. Yes, in spite of his Créole mother, he's an Anglo-Saxon and a Yankee. Therefore he is shackled with two ridiculous inheritances: English common sense, and Puritan conscience. He, accordingly, will be for prudence and morality. Copy-book morality, shop-keepers' prudence. But you are Russian; to you belongs the glorious privilege of being bold and inconsequential; that is to say, moral in a broader and more human sense, and if not prudent, wise. You may be impulsive. It's just as comfortable, believe me, to starve *à deux*, as it is to starve singly, separately. Go and get married, since marriage is the fashion, and trust to Providence for the rest. The Lord will provide."

"Yes," I said, "but you forget that there is my father."

"No, I don't. I forget nothing. What *of* your father?"

"Why, this. What you say about starving *à deux* is true enough; but we're not two, we're three. My father is the third person, and we have no right to leave him out of our reckoning. If I were to get married, how would he be provided for? You see, I have no right to get married, unless the man I marry will be able to support my father as well as myself."

"Oh, dear me, what dreadful rubbish!" grieved Armidis, suddenly assuming his most plaintive manner. "As if you couldn't go on doing *your* work, earning *your* share of the provender, just as well after marriage as before it! As if, though a maid may toil, a wife must simply sit still with folded hands while her husband does double labor! Such conventionality? Such Philistinism! Evil communications corrupt good manners. I see, by constant association with your Mr. North, *you're* becoming a thing of prudence too. There's no telling where you'll end. If—if *you* should turn Anglo-Saxon! Horror! You, whom I have hitherto regarded as my one sure refuge, my one kindred spirit, to whom I could always look for understanding, for sympathy, in my follies! Rock of ages, cleft for me!"

"Thank you," I cried, laughing. Then I added in all gravity, "We are in no hurry to get married, Mr. Armidis. We are very happy as things are at present. We are content to wait and hope. We are young; we have the future. You know my father's maxim: Between ourselves the past wasn't worth a button, the future will be delightful, meanwhile let's enjoy the present. We have adopted it. For my part, there's only one thing that troubles me."

"And that is?"

"That we have to keep it all a secret from my father. The feeling that we are deceiving him, and the fear lest he may discover it."

"Well, but what if he should discover it? What have you to fear?"

"Oh, he would never approve of it. He would forbid our meeting, or seeing each other, or having anything to do with each other."

Armidis stood still before me, eying me with his quizzical, searching gaze.

"And do you mean to say," he demanded, slowly, bearing upon each word, "do you mean to tell me that if your father forbade your meeting, you would even dream of obeying him? . . . Look me in the eye, and answer me that."

"What else would there be to do?" I answered. "We have to live together, my father and I. It would be insupportable if we had to live together in a state of discord. He has very old-fashioned ideas about the obedience that children, and especially daughters, owe their parents, you know. Besides which, he is very firm. When he takes a stand of any kind, you could no more move him than you could move a mountain. If I should refuse to obey him in any matter of serious importance, he would never rest, he would never let me rest, until I had given in to him."

"Enough! Enough!" cried Armidis. "*Ça, c'est le comble.* You are determined to be wretched; and you too are firm; and your determinations are not to be shaken."

"But I am not wretched, I am very happy."

"Well, have it so if you wish. But a few months hence? And then for all the rest of your life! Oh, dear, oh, dear! Ah, if I were you, and Paul Mikhaelovitch Banakin were my father, and I were in love with a young man, and the young man returned the compliment, and Paul Mikhaelovitch tried to interfere—do you know what I'd do? I'd bring him to reason quickly enough. I'd starve him out. I'd strike. I'd say, 'Very good, my father: we will bow to your august desires. But I feel the need of a vacation. I'm not going to give any more music lessons, or translate any more sensation novels, or color any more photographs, for some time to come. *You* may pitch in and earn our living for a while.' . . . That's what I'd say to him; and just as soon as the boot began to pinch a little, he'd come round. Obedience, indeed! It's the member of the firm who foots the little bills who's entitled to demand obedience. There! I've said my say."

"Yes. But I'm not up to such heroic treatment. My father is my father, and I love him. Besides, I trust in the future. I am sure it will all come right in the end. I don't want to spoil everything by any rash action now."

"Well, I wash my hands of you. I've done my best, and failed. Now I disclaim all responsibility. Understand that; and don't come and reproach me for the sorrows you are sowing the seeds of now, when they blossom in the time to be. I don't want to croak, but blossom they will, and blossom they must. And some fine day, after your father has succeeded in separating you from the man of your choice, and in uniting you to the man of his, then you will remember the advice I've lavished upon you to-day; and oh, me! how you will repent having spurned it! That's all."

But I should convey an altogether false idea of the situation if I allowed it to be imagined that this somewhat dismal aspect of our affair was constantly before our minds. On the contrary, for the most part we were able to forget it, and to give ourselves up unreservedly to the happiness of the moment.

We saw each other every day. As the summer advanced, a good many of my pupils left town. Then the time that I had formerly spent teaching at their houses, I would spend at home, working at my translations. Toward five o'clock in the afternoon I would put aside my manuscripts, and Julian would come for us, and we would dedicate the remaining hours of the day and evening to the gods of pleasure. It was enough for him and me that we were together; what we did made very little difference to us. We never tired of our small daily routine; it never seemed humdrum or monotonous to us; the Luxembourg, the Concombre Rose, a café in the Boulevard St. Michel, then the Hôtel du St. Esprit, and good-night. . . . Sometimes, though, we would vary it a little, by dining on the other side of the Seine, and thence betaking ourselves to Armidis's rooms, where we would have music and supper. Then, as I have already said, we would devote our Sundays and holidays to little excursions into the country. We would carry our breakfast with us in a basket, and picnic in the open air. This was primarily for the sake of economy, though, I suspect, we enjoyed it far better in this way, than we should have done if we had taken it at a restaurant. . . .. But it did not matter what we did, or where we went; so long as we were together, within sight and hearing of each other, we were happy. Mere existence in each other's presence was a deep sweet ecstacy. Our hearts were overflowing with the joy of life, the joy of life and youth and love. The whole outer world was transfigured for us; the simplest things, the most trivial happenings, were invested with a sort of celestial glamour; so that when I shut my eyes, and imagine myself back in that time now, a delicious warmth seems to pervade my senses, the air becomes sweet with a perfume like that of roses, I seem to hear vague soft music, and my heart trembles with an exquisite, unreasoning delight—all this with the sunny streets of Paris, or the green banks of the Seine, or the shadowy avenues of the Bois de Meudon, for a background.

Our dissipations were always necessarily of an inexpensive kind, and therefore they were apt to be, as my father complained, plebeian, and to smack of Bohemia. On the night of the 14th July, for instance, Armidis insisted upon our accompanying him to an open-air ball that was in progress at the Place d'Italie. My father very strenuously objected, but Armidis would not hear him.

"Very good. If you're above it, Banakin, Monica and I, who aren't proud, will go without you, and Mr. North shall come to chaperone us. By-bye!"

"It will be low, and very likely improper," my father urged.

"Sich be our tastes," retorted Armidis. "*Allez.* Put on your hat, and let us be off."

My father ended by obeying him.

It was great fun, and entirely harmless. There were booths at which sweetmeats and cheap ribbons and toys were sold; and there were merry-go-rounds, with painted wooden elephants and horses, camels, and tigers, all of one size, where you could take a circular ride for a penny; and there were mysterious-looking tents, into which voluble Merry-Andrews, in paint and motley, eloquently exhorted you to enter, and hear your fortune told for a consideration of fifty centimes. Of course there were Punch and Judy shows, and of course no end of little soldiers and people were dancing on the pavement to the music of barrel-organs.

The best fun of all, however, was Armidis himself, who enjoyed it like a child, and whose pink and white face beamed with one perpetual broad smile of beatitude. He bought four tin trumpets at one of the booths—which made a trumpet apiece for each of us—and a pocketful of sweets at another; and then he went about blowing his trumpet and munching his sweets, and was in the seventh heaven. He led us all into one of the tents, and had our fortunes told; he engaged a chariot on one of the merry-go-rounds—oh, but a chariot! of gold and ivory, if you please, and drawn by four terrific griffins—and kept us driving round and round till we were giddy. Finally he bundled us into a cab, and took us to the Foyot for a supper. . . . And from first to last he had seized every opportunity to pair off with my father, so that Julian and I could be alone together; for which kindness he had paid himself by shooting at us every now and then a knowing, confidential smile, and beginning to sing, softly, as if in absence of mind, "Gather ye rose-buds while ye may!"

Oh, how happy we were, how happy! Indescribably happy; impossibly happy, it seems now. When, from thinking of those days, and forgetting the years that have passed since they were here, I come back to the present, and realize that they are gone, gone forever, gone as utterly as if they had never been . . . oh, my God, my God! how can I live and bear it?

VII.

One morning in the first week of September a commissionaire brought us a note from Armidis, which read as follows:

"My hated rival X . . . has sent me a box for this evening at the Opéra Comique, where they are performing his latest atrocity. I invite you three companions of the St. Esprit to go and endure it with me. Moral support! Put on the full panoply of your *abiti neri e decorazioni*, and expect me between seven and eight. I'm afraid I shan't be able to meet you at the Concombre Rose. *Bien à vous*—$\overset{\text{V}}{\text{A}}$."

That was the rubric with which he always signed his notes—a V superimposed upon an A, giving the effect of an elongated X.

"Oh, yes, we will go, we will go," said my father. "But what a droll fellow he is, to be sure, this Armidis! He bids us put on our evening costume, which would go without saying, inasmuch as we are to occupy a box, whereas he himself—in what array will he appear, I should like to know? He who, I will wager, has not a dress-suit to his name. I tremble with apprehension. They will not admit him, if he presents himself in his customary rags, as he is entirely capable of doing; but what else does he possess to put on?"

"Yes, I wonder what he will wear," I responded, rather absently, for I had the question of my own toilette to preoccupy me.

"I only hope," pursued my father, "that he will not contrive to cast ridicule or odium upon our whole party."

"Oh, that will be all right," said Julian, when my father had confided his trepidation to him. "Dress-suits can be hired. He'll hire one for the occasion."

After dinner we assembled in our room, to wait for him.

"Oh, how beautiful you are looking! What a pretty gown!" Julian had whispered to me, thereby causing me a flutter of pleasure and excitement. "I never saw you in anything so becoming before."

It was the best gown I had, one that I had made myself from materials purchased at the Petit St. Thomas at a bargain; but it was nothing very dazzling, I can assure you. He had committed the extravagance of buying me a big bunch of roses.

Presently there came a sharp, imperative rap-rap-rap at our door, which we recognized at once for Armidis's.

"*Entrez, entrez,*" my father and I called out in a breath.

The door opened, and Armidis advanced into the room. . . .

At sight of him, we three others first started back and gasped; then for an instant we stared at him in helpless silence, as if petrified; at last we broke into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

He was arrayed in the uniform of a captain of the French army.

We were overcome by a *fou-rire.* We laughed and laughed, till it seemed as if we could never stop. He stood still and gazed at us with a frown of injury and bewilderment, as who should say, "What in the world has happened to you? Have you all gone mad?"

The uniform was rather worn and threadbare; the jacket was whitish along the seams; the golden shoulder-cords were tarnished; here and there a button was missing; and the whole affair was two or three sizes too small for him, so that he looked painfully compressed and squeezed in; and you were irresistibly reminded of a corpulent sausage crowded into a skin far, far too tight, and you could not help fearing that at any moment the skin might burst. The effect of his big feet and fat red hands protruding from the short, snug sleeves and trousers, was ludicrous enough; but I can imagine nothing more absurdly funny than the incongruity between his pink, mild, infantile face, as fresh and chubby and pacific as a cherub's, softened by the vast mane and beard of snow-white hair that surrounded it, and his martial make-up. And then the air of blank incomprehension, and of hurt and resentment, with which he waited for us to recover our sobriety!

"Well, really," he began, with a certain querulous jauntiness, by and by, "when you are quite ready, I should be glad to learn what the joke is."

"Since when have you received your commission?" gasped my father.

"I'm sure, if you're laughing at my uniform, you're very foolish," the composer said, with an accent of nonchalant superiority. "You can't be so ignorant of the usages of Society as not to know that an officer's uniform is the equivalent of a civilian's dress-suit. I don't happen to have a dress-suit, so I wear this instead. There's nothing to laugh at."

"True enough, true enough. But where did you get it? How did you come by it?" my father pursued.

"Oh, I came by it honestly. A friend of mine, a captain, had outgrown it, had got too stout for if, if you must know the fact, and he gave it to me. I've only had it about a fortnight, and this is the first time I've worn it in public. I think it's exceedingly becoming, though perhaps it might fit a little better. But the color of the trousers! A perfect feast for the eye!"

"Oh, as for the fit," laughed Julian, "it fits you like your skin."

"Yes, but I assure you it's too small, painfully too small. *Il faut souffrir pour être beau;* and it pinches me cruelly. But I don't dare to sigh, lest it should burst."

"Well, I don't know, I'm not a lawyer," said my father. "But I'd be willing to wager a good deal that you're violating some section of the penal code by wearing it. If you should be arrested . . . ?"

"Oh, bird of ill omen! Don't, don't!" pleaded Armidis, becoming plaintive. "How can you be so unfeeling? To suggest such a thing! Oh, you don't really think there's any danger, do you? Not really? Say you don't. I came from the house in a *fiacre*, so that nobody saw me. I don't want to be arrested. What shall I do?"

"Oh, now that you've gone so far, you may as well go to the end," my father answered. "Brazen it out. Put on your grand air, and carry it off. Of course you must take your chances. At the worst, it's not a capital offence; only a few years' retirement from the world."

"Oh, I see! You're only teasing. Cruel! At first I thought you might be in earnest, and I was frightened . . . Well, shall we start? . . . Mercy upon me! How fine we are, with our silks and flowers and furbelows! Quite killing!" he concluded, addressing me.

We set out to walk to the Place St. Michel, where we were to take the omnibus . . . Almost the first persons we encountered, as we turned into the Boulevard, were three little soldiers, who, directly they beheld Armidis, brought their hands to their caps, in salute.

"Oh, misery, misery!" he began to grieve, as soon as they had passed. "What am I to do? If all the soldiers we chance to meet are going to salute me! Surely I'll betray myself, my imposture will be unmasked, and perhaps they'll send me to jail. How absurd of them, how indelicate! To touch their caps to a man who doesn't know them, who doesn't want to know them. It's very pushing and presumptuous of them, isn't it?"

"Oh, extremely so," said Julian, sympathetically.

"But what shall I do?" he pursued, with eagerness. "It's a complication that I never dreamed of, and I haven't the remotest notion what to do. You, Monica, you who are practical and ready-witted and far-seeing and everything, tell me."

"Why not return their salute?" I suggested.

"Oh, to be sure! Return their salute! Why, of course! Oh, thank you so very much. Strange that I shouldn't have thought of it myself, but I *am* so stupid and inefficient. Yes, yes, I'll return their salute."

We passed a good many more soldiers before the evening was over, whose cap-touching Armidis graciously acknowledged not only by touching his, but by adding to that gesture a most affable smile and nod.

After the performance he begged us to go home with him for supper; but my father, who seemed to be in a bad humor about something, rather impatiently declined.

On our way to the Hôtel du St. Esprit my father scarcely spoke. This caused me a vague anxiety and disquiet, and I kept wondering what could have gone wrong with him. When we had said good-night to Julian, and were alone together in our room, I asked him.

"I see that something is troubling you," I began. "Will you tell me what it is?"

"What it is?" he repeated, looking at me with cold, ominous eyes. "You ask me that? Well, it is that my faith in human nature has this evening recieved a blow from which it will not soon recover. Do you understand? Or must I be more specific? . . . Ah, you blush, you turn pale. I do not wonder. This evening, at one and the same instant, I learn that my daughter has been deceiving me, and that a young man whom I have mistaken for a gentleman, and regarded as a friend, and trusted accordingly, has been abusing my confidence in the most shameful and cowardly manner. Is that enough? To be exact, in the box in the theatre, I chanced to overhear something that Mr. North had the impertinence to whisper in your ear; and I observed that, so far from resenting it, you even welcomed it with a smile. I was as much outraged as I was astonished."

He paused; but, though every word that he had spoken had stung me like a lash, I could not answer. A thousand different ideas, fears, hopes, impulses, resolutions, went whirling through my brain in wild confusion. In a little while he continued. . . .

"Owing to the exigencies of our position, I have been compelled to accord to you a degree of personal freedom to which young unmarried women of your class are not accustomed. I relied upon your own appreciation of the circumstances, upon your honor, your self-respect, as well as upon your common-sense, not to take advantage of my enforced indulgence. But what do I find? I find that, forgetting what was due to yourself, your father, your sex, your position, you have, like any common girl of the people, formed a disreputable, an impossible connection with a young man. A young man? A young beggar! An individual who has neither rank, nor fortune, nor prospects; a Bohemian, a vagabond, an adventurer. And this, not only without the sanction of your father, but without his knowledge, secretly, covertly, *à la dérobée.* His conduct in thus clandestinely paying you his addresses, I do not need to stigmatize; it speaks for itself. Of yours in accepting them, I will only say that it has destroyed the security and the happiness of my domestic life. My daughter has deceived me once in one thing:

how can I avoid the inference that she has deceived me often in many things? Heaven knows how far you may have gone!"

At this I found my tongue.

"We have gone no farther than to confess our love to each other. We could not help loving each other. I have not meant to deceive you. I have simply held my tongue. There was nothing to tell, except that we loved each other. It would only have troubled you, and brought misery to us. I do not see why the happiness or the security of your life should be affected."

"Never mind, never mind. I do not care to discuss it with you, or to listen to your evasions and excuses. You may hold your opinion, I may hold mine. It is not a matter for discussion, it is a matter for action. Mr. North is in no position to marry. Even if he were, I might still have my objections to make to an alliance between the daughter of one of the most illustrious houses in the noblesse of Russia, and a nameless American. But he is not, and that is final. It is therefore incumbent upon me, as your father, to forbid you to have anything further to do with him. You must from this time forth treat him as a stranger. I demand from you a promise of obedience. If you refuse to promise, I shall take measures accordingly. That is all."

"Of course I refuse to promise," I cried. "You have no right to treat me like this—to try to deprive me of the only real happiness that has ever come into my life. Do you wish me to be nothing but a slave, a machine? Am I entitled to none of the ordinary experiences of life? Why should you begrudge me my one little joy? Isn't my life gloomy enough, narrow enough, hard enough already? Don't I do my duty by you to the best of my powers? Oh, it is too unjust, too cruel!"

I was beside myself with pain and anger; therefore I spoke not very coherently, and I said things that I ought never to have said to my father.

"I will have your obedience in this matter, whatever it may cost me," he retorted, hotly. "You are of full age; so I cannot shut you up in a convent, as I might do if you were still a minor. But there are moral measures of restraint that I can take, which will be effectual enough. This is a case where the ends will justify the means. She would betroth herself to a pauper, *pardieu!* No, no; *ça ne se fait pas dans notre famille.* . . . The only real happiness that has ever come into your life, do you say? It is intolerable, your saying such a thing to me, your father, a man who has lived for nothing but your happiness ever since you were born. It is your true, your ultimate happiness which I am trying to assure to you now, but which you, in the blindness of this impossible infatuation, would destroy. . . . Now you may leave me. I have nothing more to say to you. Go to bed."

But when, next morning, after a most miserable, sleepless night, I came down-stairs to his room, I was surprised to be greeted by him with as much kindness and affection as if we had parted on the best of terms.

"Good-morning, my dear," he said. "Come and kiss me. There! You have been crying. Your eyes are all red and swollen. You have lain awake all night? So have I. I have been thinking it over, thinking it over; and I have concluded that I was hasty in the attitude I took last evening. You see, the discovery had been so sudden; I hadn't had leisure in which to get over the shock it caused me. And I was hurt at the thought that you had concealed it from me. It wounded me to think that you had not been more frank and open with me. . . . However, no more of that. Let bygones be bygones.

I've had plenty of time to consider it during the night, and I have determined to make the best of it. I am willing to concede as much as with any sort of propriety I can, provided that you and he, on your side, will agree to behave like reasonable and mature human beings, and not like children. But first of all I want you to examine yourself, and tell me whether you are entirely sure of your own mind. At your age one is very apt to mistake a passing caprice or fancy for a genuine passion. For instance, suppose that there were no impediments of any kind to a marriage between you, are you quite sure that you would be willing to become his wife?"

What I answered to all this I do not need to repeat. My father had suddenly lifted me out of the deepest quagmire of the Slough of Despond into the seventh circle of delight. I was not chary of my expressions of gratitude and affection; I felt as though I could never make due amends for my injurious speeches of the night before. He kept protesting, with an air of embarrassment, "There, there! That will do. Let bygones be bygones. Say no more about it." At last he rang the bell, and when the garçon had responded to it, "Will you rap at the door of Mr. North," my father asked, "and if he be in, convey to him my compliments, and the request that he will favor me with a visit before he leaves the house?"

A minute or two later Julian entered the room.

My father made him his most ceremonious bow, and begged him to be seated.

Then, "Since I saw you last evening, Mr. North," he said, "my daughter has confided to me the fact that you and she have formed an attachment for each other. You are a very young man, and I am getting to be very old. I hope, therefore, you will not take it amiss if I say to you, without rancor, as a father might speak to a son—*en bon papa*, in fine—that I should have been better pleased if you had followed the usages of the world a little more closely, and opened your mind to me, before opening your heart to her. I will not deny that I have felt a little hurt at your lack of frankness."

"The reason for my not speaking to you, Mr. Banakin," Julian rejoined, "was simply that I had nothing to say. There was no use telling you that I loved your daughter, unless I could ask you to consent to our marrying, or, at least, becoming engaged. But that I couldn't do, because, as you know, I'm disgustingly poor. I had never meant to tell *her* that I loved her, either. I realized perfectly well that I had no manner of right to do so. I ought to have gone away—cleared out, and taken my secret with me. But I hadn't the—well, then—the—the grit. One evening we were talking together, and it came out before I knew it. I admit that it was all wrong."

"Oh, I don't know; I don't know that I should judge it quite so harshly as that," my father said. "It was unfortunate, certainly, that in the actual state of our circumstances, yours and mine, she and you should have come to care for each other; but I do not know that you can be blamed especially for making a clean breast of it, when once the mischief was done. Human nature must be allowed for; and we all know that secrets of that sort are hard to keep. However, we will not dwell on that aspect of the affair. Let bygones be bygones. What we ought to consider now, in a spirit of mutual friendliness, are the practical difficulties, the material obstacles, that it presents. You and Monica love each other, but you are in no position to get married. What, then, is to be done?"

"It is very good of you to take it in this way. What is to be done? Of course there's only one thing for me to do—pack up and leave. Go home to America. That's not very pleasant, but it can't be helped. It's been the only thing for me to do, the inevitable thing, from the beginning. My four years are up; my money is all spent; I have barely enough left now to pay my passage to New York. It's pretty hard to admit, but it's desperately certain—I must leave Paris, and go to America. When I get there I'll . . . I'll seek my fortune. I'll set to work, and try to haul myself out of my hole. I'll try to make a position and an income for myself. If I succeed, I'll come back here, and if she still cares for me, ask you for Monica's hand with a clear conscience. If I fail . . . well, God have mercy on me."

My father rose, and held out his hand to Julian.

"You speak like a man of sense, courage, and honesty," he said. "Of your own accord you have suggested precisely the course that I was going to propose to you. . . I trust that you, my daughter, perceive with us that this is the only wise and promising step that can be taken."

"Oh, I suppose it's *wise*," I assented. And it seemed as if I could hardly pronounce the words, for the great aching lump that filled my throat. "Yes, I suppose it's wise, but that does not make it any less terrible, any easier to bear."

"Hard to bear you will unquestionably find it, both of you," my father went on. "But life is made up for the most part of things that are hard to bear. We may none of us hope to escape them; the most we can do is to make the best of them, accepting them, resignedly, reverently, as a part of the mysterious discipline that an inscrutable Providence has imposed upon us. But hard as it seems, it is the only means possible to your eventual happiness. The longer Mr. North lingers here in Paris, the longer must his ultimate success be delayed. The sooner he leaves and begins his career, the sooner will he be able to come back. . . . Yes, I will permit you to write to each other, with certain stipulations. You must not write oftener than once a month, and the letters must all be of a tone simply friendly, such as I may read. Until you are actually betrothed, which will not be, of course, until your circumstances are more flourishing than at present, I cannot sanction a correspondence of a more intimate character. . . . Now that is all settled. There is nothing further to determine, except the date of your departure."

"Oh, if the wrench has got to come, there's no use putting it off, I suppose," said Julian, in a dull, dry voice. "It will hurt just as much at one time as at another. I'll . . . I'll sail . . . next Saturday."

I shall never forget the face he turned upon me as he spoke those words; it is before me now as vividly as it was then; so pale, so pale, with lips drawn in the ghost of a smile, and eyes that burned with anguish, and hopelessness, and a sort of dumb appeal. For me, the coldness of death entered into my heart. It was as if a skeleton hand gripped it, so that each pulsation sent a wave of pain throughout my body.

He left me on Friday, taking the train for Rotterdam, whence he was to sail.

PART III.

PRINCE LÉONTICHEFF.

I.

One morning in June, 1885, my father looked up from a newspaper that he had been reading, and said to me, "You remember my old friend Léonticheff, Gregory Ivanovitch Léonticheff, do you not, Monica?"

"Prince Léonticheff? Oh, yes, I remember him," I answered, listlessly.

"You were quite a child when he died. That was in seventy-four. You were about thirteen years old. . . . And his son, Gabriel, do you remember him?"

To this I said No; I could not remember Prince Léonticheff's son.

"Gregory Ivanovitch, himself a prince of the Empire, and one of the richest noblemen in Europe, made what his friends considered rather a misalliance. He married an Englishwoman, a sister of Sir Alfonso Luckstone, an immensely wealthy banker, reputed to be of Jewish extraction, but a convert to Christianity. She was a vulgar, loud-voiced creature, whom, for my part, I could never endure. Their son, Gabriel Gregoreivitch, was educated in England, at Eton, and then at Oxford. It is possible that you never saw him, though he used to come home for his holidays. He is a few years your senior, perhaps now eight or nine and twenty. Yet already he has contrived to win distinction in two countries; in England as the author of several clever novels, and in Russia as one of the few subjects honored by the personal friendship of the Emperor. He is moreover enormously rich. For, besides the vast estates that came to him in Russia from his father, his mother left a very large personal fortune in the English funds. He owns one of the handsomest mansions in London, Salchester House, in Park Lane, described as nothing less than a palace; and he has a fine country-seat, not far from London, on the banks of the Thames, called Argelby Court. . . . I am reminded of all this by a paragraph in *Figaro*, from which I learn that he is in Paris at the Grand Hôtel. I think I will call upon him. It is of course a slender chance, but if I could interest him in my affair, it would be to gain it. A word from him to the Emperor would be invaluable. He cannot have forgotten the close intimacy that existed between me and his lamented father. Perhaps for the sake of that he will wish to serve me."

So in the afternoon, having dressed himself with even more scrupulous care than usual, my father went off, to leave his card upon the young Prince Léonticheff, at the Grand Hôtel.

While he was away, Armidis came.

The friendship between Armidis and myself had deepened and ripened a good deal during the last year and a half, and it had gained a good deal in seriousness. That year and a half had been desolate and dreary enough for me; but it must have been drearier and more desolate still, except for Armidis's constant gentle sympathy and comradeship. Especially during the last five months! For more than five months I had not a line or word from Julian. In the alternating terror and despair that his silence caused me, I believe I should have gone mad, if it had not been for Armidis. Not that he did anything or said anything to make the silence less cruel or less ominous; nobody save Julian himself could have said or done anything to that effect; but somehow I felt less utterly cast down and forsaken, because of the tender friendship and affection that Armidis in his whole bearing toward me implied, rather than expressed by word of mouth.

Was my lover dead? Or—had he forgotten me?

"Ah, alone? Alone?" cried Armidis, gayly, as he entered the room; and I saw that he was in one of his jaunty débonnaire moods to-day. "Where is the Lily? Wherefore has he deserted you?"

I explained the reason of my father's absence.

"Soho! A prince! Gracious goodness me! How swell we are, leaving our cards on Anglo-Russian princes! And Prince Léonticheff at that! Oh, yes, I've read one or two of his novels. Yes, they're unquestionably clever. But prince or peasant, it's the same to me. When I'm in England, I'm a howling snob. In England one can't afford to be anything else. But when I leave England for the Continent, I leave my grovelling worship for rank, wealth, and titles behind me. Prince or peasant, I'm equally thankful for the opportunity I owe him of finding you alone. I'll not disguise it from you, Monica Paulovna, from day to day the society of your venerable parent becomes more and more insupportable to me. If I tolerate him at all, it is simply because he is an inevitable concomitant to you. Every rose has its thorn. From day to day he shrinks visibly further into his armor of selfishness. If it weren't for you, I'd just lavish upon him one solid thundering piece of my mind, and forever after cut him dead. Ouf!"

"Hush!" I protested. "I cannot allow you to talk like that about my father. You are utterly unjust, as well as unkind; and besides, I am his daughter."

"You're right, quite right. Not in calling me unjust, but in declaring yourself to be his daughter. Incredible as it may seem, you *are* his daughter; and it's all wrong and indelicate and in bad taste and everything for me to abuse him in your presence. But then I'm not like other people, you know, and you must make allowances for the idiosyncrasies of genius. I take it all back, except the point. I *am* glad to find you alone."

He sat down beside me, and took my hand, and looked into my eyes with a smile so bright, so sweet, so touching in its determined cheerfulness, that all at once my heart seemed to melt and go out to him; and then, involuntarily, before I knew what I was doing, I began to cry.

He patted my cheek and stroked my hair with his hand; and very softly he said, "That is right, dear. Cry, cry. . . . It will do you good."

"Oh, he's dead," I sobbed, wildly. "I'm sure he's dead. Or else he has forgotten all about me. Oh, I can't bear it, I can't bear it. Oh, what shall I do?"

"There—there—there," Armidis murmured, as one does to soothe a child. "No, no, he isn't dead, and he hasn't forgotten you. You pale women with the red hair . . . oh, well, not red, if that offends you; we'll call it golden . . . you pale women with the eyes and the hair aren't the sort that men forget. You may feel easy in your mind so far as that's concerned. In the whole length and breadth of his horrid old American continent you need fear no rival I don't mean that you're so handsome, you know; don't delude yourself; but you're so peculiar-looking. Unkind but honest; I was ever thus, a plain, blunt man."

He paused and laughed, and then he went on. . . .

"The trouble isn't that he's dead or oblivious; no, no. If you were not the daughter of Paul Mikhaelovitch Banakin—oh, why do you Russians have such tiresome names? —if you were not the daughter of your father, and if therefore it would not be improper to the last degree for me to do so, I should tell you that I have a private suspicion in the secret places of my own consciousness to the effect that he, the said P. M. B., is at the bottom of the whole mystery. I should say that I powerfully suspect him of having intercepted Mr. North's letters. He found that the affair between you two young people was prolonging itself far, far beyond anything that he had foreseen when he bundled Mr. North off to his native land; and he said to himself that the time had come for him to step in and stop it. Then, like the practical spirit that he is, he proceeded to put his resolution in operation by pocketing Mr. North's epistles. I should say all this to you, if the gentleman in question were not your father. But by an unfortunate combination of circumstances over which I have no control, he *is* your father. Therefore I say nothing of the kind; but I will call your attention to another theory that perhaps interprets the event equally well."

He paused again, this time to light a cigarette. After he had sent several voluminous clouds of smoke curling up toward the ceiling, he resumed. . . .

"No, our friend Julian is neither dead nor oblivious, my dear; but—he is foolish and conscientious. He doesn't get on so rapidly as in the ardor and ignorance of his youth he had hoped to do. He finds that what our French neighbors call the strig-for-lif isn't the playful little pastime that he had supposed it would be, but on the contrary a singularly slow, up-hill, serious piece of business. He begins to see that instead of weeks and months, it's likely to be years and years before he can come back, a capitalist, to claim your hand . . . just what your dear delightful papa saw from the outset, and which accounted for his sudden and excessive amiability in getting North shipped for the wilderness. Finally the foolish and conscientious young fellow has said to himself, 'What right have I, who am I, to keep that girl with the eyes and the hair waiting and pining for me all these years, and wasting her youth over my memory? It isn't fair. No, no. I must put a period to it. I mustn't write to her any more, or remind her of my existence any more. I must efface myself, and give her a chance to forget me. Then if I ever do succeed, then I can go back, and, if the field is still free, try to win her once again.' . . . That is what he says to himself, and that's the reason for his present silence—always assuming that he really is silent, and that no wicked fairy is purloining his letters. I understand all this, because once upon a time I was Anglo-Saxon myself. By and by he'll realize how foolish he is. He'll realize that it's perfectly preposterous to put things off till he's in receipt of a regular income. Then one fine day, he'll turn up here in Paris, and we'll have a Slavo-Yankee wedding, and we'll all be happy —except possibly Paul M. Banakin, and he'll have to make the best of it."

Oh, no, no, no! I had thought of all this myself. There was no possible explanation of Julian's silence that I had not thought of. In the long miserable days and weeks of waiting, fearing, hoping, brooding, I had had ample time to think, and I had thought of little else. Every imaginable conjecture, every imaginable suspicion, had passed through my mind. But by degrees I had lost my hold upon all of them, save these two: that he had died, or that he did not love me any more. I was sure my father had not purloined his letters; he would be incapable of such cruelty, and doubly incapable of stooping to a conspiracy with the servants of the hotel, which would be essential to the success of any such design. Yet, even that suspicion, unworthy as it was, had occurred to . . . No, all that Armidis could say was powerless to comfort me, or to give me any new ground for hope: but the deep sweet kindness that shone from his eyes, and vibrated in his voice, made my heart grow big with gratitude and affection.

"Meantime," he continued, after a little while, "we are getting a good deal of experience. We are learning how true it is that hope deferred maketh the heart sick, and we are asking ourselves that old, old question, *Cui bono?* What's the use? It's all very bitter and discouraging; but it's the sort of experience that sooner or later, in one form or another, must come to every man and woman. If it comes to us a little sooner, instead of a little later—why, so we'll get to the other end of it sooner, and come out again at the bright side. It's one of the dismal tunnels through which the way of life is laid. No one can hope to avoid it. . . . When I was a young man, in England, years and years ago, I knew a young girl. . . . But there! Details are nothing to the point. I'll not tire you with the story. Some time, though, when you are at my shop, remind me of it, and I will show you something."

"The story won't tire me, I promise you. Tell it to me," I pleaded. "Tell me now."

"Unless my ears deceive me," he returned, "I hear the step of Paul the son of Michael on the stairs. Yes, and his voice. He's not alone. There's some one with him. Who? Not, surely not, his Anglo-Russian Prince. Fancy a prince in the Hôtel du St. Esprit! But who then? Who else?"

Suddenly, and without any sort of reason, my heart began to palpitate . . . Could it be . . . ? Oh, no, there was no earthly chance of that: and yet the mere fancy, absurd, impossible, as it was, taking shape in my imagination, made my body tremble, and I could hardly get my breath. I put out my hand, and grasped Armidis's arm.

"Why, mercy upon me, we're all in a tremor!" he exclaimed. "Oh, you mustn't let yourself hope impossible things, you know."

"Oh, no, I don't hope anything," I said. "I know it's quite impossible. It's only because I am so weak."

Then my father came into the room. A single glance sufficed to show me that he was in a state of great excitement, of elation. He was accompanied by a young man. . . .

"Monica, my daughter," he began, summoning me. Then, "Prince, permit me, permit me . . . I have the honor to present to your Serene Highness my daughter, Monica Paulovna Banakin."

After which, perceiving Armidis, "Also, if you will allow me, I beg to present our friend Monsieur Victor Armidis, the composer."

II.

I MUST endeavor to erase from my mind all that I have since learned of the character of Prince Léonticheff, together with all that long habit has since taught me to see in his appearance, and to set down here, as faithfully as possible, the first impression that I obtained of him.

I beheld, then, in the person to whom my father, with so much nervous deference, presented me, a tall and rather fat young man, of slouching carriage, and very loosely built, so that his limbs seemed to hang upon him with a certain flabby insecurity, and the effect of his body was gelatinous. He was dressed with striking and elaborate carelessness—in a velvet jacket and waistcoat, and a dove-colored flannel shirt, while his necktie was of a flame-red India silk, fastened in a sailor's knot. His dusty brown hair, thin on the crown of his head to the verge of baldness, was cropped as close as a soldier's or a convict's, so that everywhere the bluish white of his scalp was visible. His skin was florid and coarse-grained, as if it had been exposed a good deal to the weather. His face was fleshy, and the lower part of it heavy, merging into a short fat neck through the medium of an incipient double chin. His mouth, shaded by a copious mustache, was unduly long, the lips being thick and loose; his nose was short, square, and slightly turned up at the end. Thus far he was undeniably vulgar-looking and uncouth; but his forehead was broad and white and finely modelled, and his eyes, though set too far in, and not very big, were blue and pellucid, and full of good-nature and intelligence.

The general effect of the young man was remote from princely. "A Russian bear," I thought to myself. . . "An indolent, easy-going, contented fellow, the son or the grandson of peasants, a little slow, not a little rough perhaps, but by no means a fool, and above all things good-natured," is probably the guess one would have made of him. . . . I must not forget to mention his hands, which, of all his attributes, were perhaps the most unprincely, being short, blunt-fingered, hirsute, and fiery red, like the hands of a *commis-voyageur*.

One of these hands he closed upon one of mine; and said in a voice that was unresonant and throaty, but soft, caressing, almost fatherly—speaking slowly, languidly, with an exceedingly friendly, soothing, ingratiating inflexion, smiling into my eyes, and keeping possession of my hand until the end of his speech—"I am very glad to meet you again," he said in English, pronouncing that language not in the least like a foreigner, nor yet like an Englishman, but with an accent quite peculiar to himself, whereby he seemed to fatten and round out the sounds. "You don't remember me, but I have never forgotten you. I used to catch a glimpse of you now and then when you were a little mite of a girl, and I was a great, gawky boy home from school. You were the prettiest little girl I knew, and you made a wonderful impression on me. I think we are going to be friends. We must carry on the tradition of our families. Our fathers were friends, and so were our grandfathers. To tell you the truth, I begin to like you already."

His bearing, as he said all this, was one of exceeding good nature, of pleasant satisfaction with himself and everybody else, and of a comfortable, homely frankness, which, though comical, was not unprepossessing.

With his last word he gave my hand a squeeze, released it, and proffered his own to Armidis, remarking, in the same slow, caressing drawl, "Well! This is an unexpected pleasure. I've heard about you, Mr. Victor Armidis, and wanted to know you, any time these ten years. I suppose, between ourselves, that I'm one of the two or three most intelligent and most enthusiastic admirers that you can number. In my opinion you've done some of the prettiest little things in the way of lyric music that this century can show. Why, some of your songs I wouldn't hesitate to compare to Schubert's. I'm glad to press your hand. I believe we are going to like each other."

"Oh, thank you so much," returned Armidis, airily. "You quite cheer me. I'm so pleased to learn that my little things have met with your approval."

Armidis's querulous irony was plain to see, but the Prince apparently took what he said at the foot of the letter.

"Yes, I'm one of your enthusiastic admirers," he reiterated. "And I've given you a puff in "Hilary's Rosary" that will make your fortune for you. You've seen it, of course. No? You haven't? What! Why, it's running as a serial through *Macnaffen's Magazine.* I've quoted a verse from a song of yours, and I've described the melody as one of the nicest and most original little things in modern music. You must get it. It will make you the talk of the day wherever English is read. "Hilary's Rosary!" Why, it's one of the two or three"—he dropped his voice to a key of confidential intimacy, and spoke more slowly than ever, bearing impressively upon each word—"it's one of the two or three first-rate novels that have been done in the English language. It deals with Irish patriotism; and apart from its interest as fiction, it contains more authentic information about Ireland than any other dozen books put together. And then, the plot! You never saw anything prettier. And the characters. . . . ! And the workmanship, the style . . . . ! Why, my friend"—he patted Armidis gently upon the shoulder, to lend emphasis to his words—"my friend, when the serial publication of "Hilary's Rosary" is finished, and the book comes out in three volumes, the people, the People are going to rise up and greet it as the best thing since Harry Fielding."

He made this surprising statement with perfect gravity, and not a touch of embarrassment or misplaced humility. He recommended his own novel with the same serene, impersonal earnestness, the same quiet, confidential assurance, that he might have employed in advising us to read one of the acknowledged masterpieces of Tolstoi or Turguéneff.

This struck me as strange at the time; his speech lacked verisimilitude, and I almost mistrusted my ears; but before long I came to understand it. Prince Léonticheff was a clever, in some respects even an able man; upon certain subjects—for example, Irish history and Anglo-Irish politics—he was really profoundly well-informed; he could write novels that enjoyed a great vogue in England, were pirated in America, and translated into three or four foreign tongues; he was a high contracting party in the world of finance, being the power behind the sign in the great international banking-house of Luckstone Brothers; and with all the rest he had somehow known how to acquire the personal friendship and confidence of the most suspicious monarch in Europe; surely he must have been a man of remarkable abilities. Yet, as I soon came to realize, he had not one scintilla of the sense of humor! Not the first meagre rudiment of it. In consequence, he was enabled to give himself up with unreserve to that tendency innate in every individual consciousness (which a sense of humor—that is to say, a sense of proportion and of congruity—can alone correct), to regard itself as the centre of the Universe, and as the biggest, the most vital, the most important Fact. The results of this absence of humor upon Prince Léonticheff's speech and conduct were often queer; sometimes they were appalling.

"Now," he went on, turning to me, "I have come over here with your good father, to take you off to dinner with me. First we go for a drive, a little spin about the Bois, and that sort of thing, to whet our appetites; then we dine at the Ambassadeurs, where I have engaged a private room with a balcony. Your father tells me that you've lived five or six years here in Paris, without once dining at the Ambassadeurs. He thought it wouldn't be proper. Why, bless your soul, you just lower your veil as you pass in and out; and who's the wiser? I've—this is between ourselves—I've dined some of the first ladies of Europe at the Ambassadeurs; yes, the Princess——, and the Countess of ——, and Lady ——; and they've come away delighted. Now go put on your hat. My trap is waiting at the door . . . Of course, you are with us," he added, nodding to Armidis. "I want to hear you talk. People have described you to me as one of the wittiest men of your generation. I want to see for myself whether you deserve your reputation."

"Oh, really? Do people speak so kindly of me? Oh, how nice?" murmured Armidis, with a smile that was not devoid of malice. "Oh, yes, thank you, I'm with you. People have never described you to me at all, but already I begin to perceive that you are immensely unusual and curious. I shall be quite charmed."

The trap that we found waiting at the door, in charge of two gigantic powdered footmen, gorgeously liveried in buff and gold and scarlet, was an odd affair. The Prince directed our attention to its peculiarities, explaining, "It's a little thing of my own invention. One of the most remarkable facts about me is that I have a strongly developed genius for mechanics. I made the model for it with my own ten fingers, and then had it built under my supervision."

Its peculiarity consisted in its having only one seat, which, however, was ample to accommodate five people, being curved like a horse-shoe."

"It is the application of the amphitheatrical idea to a carriage," said the inventor. "It's like the stern-sheets of a boat. You see I sit here in the middle, where the skipper of the boat would sit, only, instead of a tiller I hold the reins. Then my guests distribute themselves to my right and left. The advantage is that we all face one another, and can talk together, and yet no one has to sit with his back to the horses."

The body of the vehicle was painted black, with an immense, flamboyant coat-of-arms and coronet emblazoned on it; the wheels were crimson. It was drawn by three superb white horses, one leader, and two wheelers abreast; and there was a foot-board behind for the flunkies. A decidedly conspicuous equipage; and numberless were the people who turned to stare at us, as we went dashing through the Boulevard St. Germain, across the Pont and Place de la Concorde, and up the Avenue des Champs Élysées.

Though his horses were spirited, and demanded a good deal of management, the Prince, who seemed to be a skilful driver, talked incessantly. He talked exclusively about himself, and always in his slow, simple, good-natured way.

"I came here to Paris incog.," he informed us. "I've got a nice little house of my own in the Avenue Malakoff, as I suppose you know; but I went to the Grand Hôtel, and gave my name as George Lyons. It was no go, though. Somebody there recognized me, and betrayed me to the newspapers. I was a good deal annoyed at that, because the business that brings me here is of a very secret nature, and I can't afford to let it be known that I'm in it. Just between ourselves, I'll say that there's an important newspaper for sale, and that I'm thinking of buying it. Not in my own name, no, no. But I wanted to look into its affairs, and if I concluded it was worth while, I'd buy it through a dummy. To say nothing of its usefulness, I know few things more amusing than to control a newspaper. I suppose you know who owns the *London Beacon?* Prince Gigi, my friends."

"Gigi . . . ?" repeated my father, interrogatively.

"Yes. Didn't you know? That's my nick-name: Gigi—G. G.—Gabriel Gregoreivitch. Good, isn't it? . . . But as I was saying, when you interrupted me, there's a law of compensations; and when I knew the murder was out, I made up my mind to stay, and to go in for some fun. Oh, I know how to amuse myself in Paris. . . . Besides, if it hadn't been for those annoying little paragraphs in the newspapers, I shouldn't have had the pleasure of meeting you. You only got hold of it in this morning's *Figaro;* but the first of the series appeared in the *Petit Journal* more than a week ago. . . . I passed the winter at St. Petersburg, which was very cold and gay. Then at Easter I went on to London, where I've been stopping ever since. I suppose you know I own the nicest house in London, Salchester House, in Park Lane. I bought it about five years ago, after the death of the last of the Lords Salchester. It's big, and yet it's pretty and comfortable, and I like it. But there's nothing under the sun that bores me like a London season; the people are so methodical, and business-like, and conscientious in their dissipations. And yet in one way it amuses me a good deal. I do enjoy seeing your steady-going English prigs, who in their secret hearts regard me very much as if I were the devil himself; I do enjoy seeing them swallow their prudery and pocket their scruples, and pay homage to my rank and wealth. Of course there's the fast set; but that's different; they imitate me; but I'm speaking of your steady-going, highly moral people, like the S——s, and the D——s. They never got over the shock my famous little escapade at Oxford caused them; and they don't like my attitude toward the Irish Question; and they think, because I'm bluff and hearty and condescending in my manners, that I'm vulgar and lacking in dignity; and my reputation as a gambler sends cold shivers down their spines. Yet I'm a Serene Highness, you know, and a Prince of the Russian Empire, and so they throw their houses open to me, and their daughters at my head. It's interesting. The only people I really like in London are those whom I call *la haute Bohême;* theatrical people, Irish Members, journalists, and that sort. And the only club I care for is the X——. I like that club because the men you meet there are men, masculine, virile, not effete, like the members of the Y—— and Z——, and not afraid of a good story, or a song, or a bottle of wine. Speaking of my attitude toward the Irish Question, that's a funny thing about me, and a good many people can't understand it: how, whereas in Russia I'm the most intense sort of a Reactionary, in England I do all I can in a quiet way to help on the cause of Irish Home Rule. Well, it's the simplest and the most natural thing in the world. The Irish people and the Russian people are as different as dogs and horses; and what's meat for one would be poison for the other. But it puzzles the general public, and makes talk, and affords me a great deal of amusement. I suppose you follow my leaders in the *Beacon?* No? Oh, you must, you must. One appears every Wednesday and every Saturday, when Parliament is sitting, and they're by all means the strongest things on the Irish Question that are printed nowadays—though, of course, it isn't officially known that I write them; that wouldn't do; might lead to international complications. I suppose I know more about the history of Ireland and the actual needs and conditions of the Irish, than any other living man. . . . Well, that brings me back to what I was saying of my reputation as a gambler. The truth of the matter is simply this. I'm a thoroughbred Russian; and so there's nothing that fascinates me like a game of chance; roulette, dice, black-and-red, it doesn't matter which. And I'm rich enough to afford to lose, and therefore I play. And I'd just be glad to hear anybody prove that it's immoral. I'm rich enough to lose without grumbling, and I do lose almost invariably. Why, I suppose my average annual losses would foot up something like four or five thousand pounds. And I know of no other way in which the same amount of money could buy me the same amount of pleasure. Therefore I want to know why I shouldn't play? Are you acquainted with the beautiful little American institution called draw-poker? Well, at poker alone, last month, I lost between six and seven hundred. With that bad luck at cards, you say, unless there's no truth in the proverb, I ought to be an extraordinarily fortunate young man in love. Well, perhaps I am. Ho-ho-ho!"

And the Prince suspended his discourse, to indulge in a long, loud, boisterous laugh.

At the Café des Ambassadeurs he said, "One of the funny things about me is my capacity for champagne. It's practically boundless. I can drink enough champagne at one sitting to put any other three men under the table, and never know it then or the next day. But the remarkable part of it is this; if I touch any other wine, or any spirits, I'm done for quicker than powder and shot."

He also appeared to have a considerable capacity for food; and between the courses of the dinner he smoked numberless fat cigarettes.

When the coffee was served, he looked at his watch.

"Hello!" he cried. "Half-past ten. And I've got an engagement for eleven which I can't possibly neglect. I'll have barely time now to run into my hotel, put on my dress-suit, and keep it. So I'm afraid we'll have to break up. But we must meet again to-morrow. There are lots of things I want to say to you, and lots of questions I want to ask you. Besides, I want to get thoroughly well acquainted with you. I like you — all of you. But you" — nodding to Armidis—" you've disappointed me. You've scarcely opened your mouth once since I met you, and the reason I invited you to join us was that I wanted to hear you talk. Perhaps we'll get on better to-morrow. You"— addressing my father — "you come and breakfast with me to-morrow at noon. We will talk things over, and make some arrangement for the evening. I think I'd like to dine at some little Bohemian restaurant in your Latin Quarter; and afterward perhaps we'll go to the play. . . . Good-night, good-night."

"Well, is he not refreshing?" demanded my father, when we had parted from him. "So simple, so natural, so unspoilt, so—there is but one word for it—so primitive. So unlike your conventional child of the century. What frankness, what *bonhomie!* I feel ten years younger for the hours I have passed in his company. And so friendly! He has promised to read the manuscript of my History of Russia, and I count upon him to find me a publisher. I have not yet spoken to him of my appeal to the Emperor; but I am sure he will interest himself in it.

Oh, he is the most refreshing personality I have encountered for many a long year."

"He is a very surprising character, with his barbarism, his clumsiness, his incredible vanity, his boundless admiration for himself. His bragging was funny at first, but it grew rather tiresome toward the end. I think I never saw anybody so absolutely deficient in tact. But he's apparently harmless and good-natured enough," said I.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" complained Armidis. "How can people show so little penetration? He's a great big lump of cheap vulgarity and piggish selfishness. A prince, forsooth! A lout, a boor, a bully, a cad! Simple, natural, primitive? So is a wild bear. Good-natured? Oh, wow-wow! Say satisfied, complacent, if you please. So is any other animal, when its appetites are gratified and the weather's fine. But don't say *good*-natured. Why, consider his jaw and chin. He's a great big monster of dogged, sordid, sodden egotism, as brutal as a rhinoceros, as cruel and remorseless as all beasts are in a state of nature. Why, the Pachyderm! He's not really conscious that anything or any person exists outside of his own thick hide. Egotism! The concentrated essence of egotism. A monumental bulk of egotism, slow-moving, ponderous, certain to crush every lighter body that may come between it and its objective point. Ugh! I never saw a more repulsive brute. How can—how *can* you tolerate him? The Turk!"

"Mercy on me, what a tirade," said my father. "You are angry with him because he snubbed you."

And I must confess that I myself thought Armidis uncharitable and unjust.

III.

"HERE," said Prince Léonticheff, addressing me, when, escorted by my father, he entered our room the next afternoon; and he offered me a brown paper parcel, in size and shape resembling an octavo book. "This good friend"—laying his hand upon my father's shoulder—"tells me that you translate novels into French. Well, then, I'm just the man you want to talk with. I've got a novel here that's going to make a sensation throughout the civilized world. This is my manuscript in English. It's a thing I've been at work on for upward of ten years; ever since I was a boy; not steadily, of course, but from time to time, as the inspiration seized me. I finished it about a month ago. It's short, simple, unpretentious, and I suppose the most poetical thing in English prose. Yes, or German, either, for the matter of that. When I tell you that its better than "Undine," you'll get some idea of how tremendously good it is. The central thought, the theme, is one that Goethe would have given all he ever wrote to have got hold of. . . . Open the parcel, and look at the title-page."

He took the parcel from my hand, and opened it.

"You've never seen my manuscript before," he said. "Isn't it pretty? I suppose I write at once the daintiest and the most characteristic hand of any living author."

The manuscript was indeed pretty, and his hand was indeed dainty and full of individuality, being almost microsopically small, yet as clear and as regular as print.

"A good many people think it's like Thackeray's," he went on. "But if you'll take the trouble to compare the two, you'll see that mine is more legible and more elegant. I write very rapidly, yet there's never a blot, an erasure, or an illegibility, on a single page. Isn't my title stunning? Read it out. Read it aloud. I want to hear you read it aloud."

I obediently read from his title-page: "Drachensnest: the Bishop and the Witch: being the True History of Zillah, Wife of Barzillai-Ben-Ascher, called the Witch of Drachensnest, and of Alvin, Bishop of Drachensnest: now first set forth in English by Prince Léonticheff."

"Splendid, splendid!" he cried, clapping his hands. "Why, that title is a little masterpiece. And you read it beautifully, perfectly. . . . Well, now, I'm going to leave this manuscript with you. Take good care of it, for it's worth considerably more than its weight in gold. I'm going to leave it with you, and I want you to study it. You couldn't get the full flavor of it by a single reading. You must read it straight through at least three times. Then you'll know it, you'll feel it, you'll catch the enthusiasm of it. After that, when you're thoroughly imbued with it, I want you to translate it. I want you to translate it from my manuscript under my supervision. Then I'll publish it simultaneously in French and English; and instead of your getting a beggarly little four hundred francs for a translation, you'll get half of what I receive for the original French work. I shall take it to Calmann Lévy, and sell it to him as an original work, which it will be in point of fact, not having previously appeared in any other language, and I'll give you half of all that he pays me. I translated my last novel myself, and it was published simultaneously here and in London; you'd be amazed if I should tell you what Lévy gave me for the French rights. . . . Now you take it, and study it, and let me know whether you think you'll be able to do it justice. Of course you must translate it *con amore*, or it won't do. I could put in the fine touches for you, and that sort of thing, but I'd need a good basis of nice literature to work on. The ordinary hack translation would answer well enough for an ordinary novel, but not for a little *chef-d'œuvre* like this."

I replied that I should be glad to read it, but that I feared I should not be able to make the sort of translation that he desired, for I could write none but an unpolished and unliterary French, a French that would pass muster well enough in an ordinary hack translation, but would never answer the demands for style which the French public would make upon an original work. I said this first because it was the truth; and secondly because I suspected that Prince Léonticheff, with his high opinion of his own production, would be a difficult man for even a master of French style to satisfy. . . .

I was, accordingly, a good deal relieved, when he returned, "Well, in that case, of course, you'd better not attempt it. I'm sorry, because I was glad of the chance to give you an opportunity to make some money. However, I'll leave the manuscript with you, anyhow; only do take great care of it. You'll enjoy reading it, as you probably haven't enjoyed a work of fiction for a long while. I can see that you've got taste, and can tell a good thing when you find it. Oh, it's a little jewel, a little pearl! I'll try to arrange to come here say to-morrow afternoon, and then you can read it aloud to me."

I dare say it looks like exaggeration, but I pledge my word that it is literally true. If I have not exactly repeated his speech, letter for letter, I have mitigated rather than accentuated it. And I am sure that I have faithfully rendered the spirit of it: that third-personal, objective delight in his own creation, and admiration of it, which his singular temperament enabled him to enjoy.

"But I say," he demanded, sweeping our room and our faces with an inquiring glance, "where's your eccentric friend Armidis? I expected to find him here. Isn't he the most ridiculous looking creature that was ever allowed at large? A peripatetic ragbag! I should like to give him a decent suit of clothes. But I don't suppose its want of money that causes him to make such a guy of himself; it's more probably vanity, a desire to be peculiar, conspicuous, to attract attention. Pity he's got that small weakness, because he really is a man of capital talent. I want to see more of him. I've been told that he's a great character, very amusing, a good talker, but a little cracked in the upper story. I may find him useful some time, when I need an eccentric personage for a novel. Aren't you expecting him to turn up here for dinner? I thought I made it clear last night that I wanted you all to dine with me again to-day."

"I don't know," said my father. "He may come. But he is not a person whom one can feel at all sure of. He always does the thing you least expect. He may come, he may not. It's an even chance."

The Prince's face flushed red, and his voice grew loud and harsh. . . . "But didn't he understand that I wanted him? Didn't I make that plain enough? I don't like to be treated in this cavalier manner."

"Oh, I am sure he could never intend to treat your Serene Highness cavalierly," put in my father, hastening to appease the Prince's wrath. "It is most likely that he did not understand himself to be included in your invitation."

"Well, then, he must be pretty obtuse," said the Prince.

"He is not obtuse," said I, rather bluntly. "He is the least obtuse of men. But he is extremely independent and unusual. You must take him as he is, or not at all."

"Well, anyhow, I want him," said the Prince; "and I'll tell you what. Where does he live? I'll go and fetch him. There's plenty of time. It isn't six o'clock yet and we shan't want to dine before eight. Give me his address."

My father mentioned Armidis's address, but added, "I'm afraid it is a very slim chance that you will find him at home."

"Never mind," the Prince rejoined, now again all good-nature. "I'll try the experiment. You stay here, and if he comes while I'm gone, keep him. You"—nodding to me—"you come with me. Your father won't object; will you, Banakin? I want to have a talk with you. Nobody will know who you are. And the drive will do you good. Go, put on your bonnet."

Prince Léonticheff, at that moment, struck me as the most tiresome person I had ever known, and I shrank from the notion of a drive with him. I looked for rescue to my father. That he, a most punctilious stickler for the proprieties, would sanction the Prince's proposition, I never so much as dreamed. For me, an unmarried woman, to go about the streets of Paris alone in a carriage with a young man!

But to my surprise, and equally to my regret, my father demanded sharply, "Well! Well! Have you not heard? Go put on your bonnet."

There was no help for it. Prince Léonticheff was a man whom, for my father's sake, I must not offend. And now that my father had said yes, I could not very graciously say no.

A simple Victoria, drawn by a single horse, and driven by a coachman in plain black livery, stood in front of the Hôtel du St. Esprit.

"It is sometimes a relief," said the Prince, when he had helped me into this vehicle, "to put aside the pomp and splendor by which I am usually surrounded, and to go in for a little quiet, unostentatious comfort. On the whole, I thoroughly enjoy being a prince and a millionaire. I enjoy the romance of it, the celebrity, the luxury, and the power. Some very rich or very illustrious men are always tormented by the suspicion that nobody really likes them for themselves, and that the people who are pleasant and cordial to them are all toadies, and have ulterior designs —axes to grind, as the saying is. But I consider that morbid and unreasonable. No such fancy ever disturbs me. I know I'm a nice, good-natured fellow, a good talker, a hearty companion, and I don't see why people *shouldn't* like me for myself, just as well as they would if I were a pauper or a nonentity. Of course there are a certain number of people whom I can single out instantly as mere favor-hunters and sycophants; I have very delicate instincts and intuitions; but when all is said, they're an insignificant minority. The great mass of the people who make themselves agreeable to me, do so because they like me. I know that to be a fact, because I've gone around a good deal incog., and I've been just as well treated then, as when I've sailed under my true colors. Understand?"

"Yes," I said, "I understand."

"Well, that's the long and the short of the matter; I enjoy my wealth and my rank immensely, but only on the condition that I can step down and become a common every-day man among men whenever the whim seizes me. Now to-day, you see, I've quite put aside all pomp and circumstance, and am driving about in a one-horse Victoria, like any bourgeois. I suppose the people that see us pass, think I'm some prosperous shop-keeper, or a notary, or something, eh?"

"Yes, very likely," I said, feeling that he expected me to say something.

"You know," he went on, "it's generally believed that a really extraordinary man is always extraordinary in more ways than one. Well, look at me. I'm extraordinary first as one of the two or three richest and most eminent noblemen in Europe; then, if you please, as one of the shrewdest and most influential financiers; then as one of the most extravagant and reckless *viveurs;* finally as perhaps the ablest living novelist, and certainly the ablest writing in English. The consequence is that wherever I go, I'm pointed out: here as his Serene Highness Prince Léonticheff; there as the chief of the great house of Luckstone Brothers; elsewhere as the author of "The Weird Sovereign;" elsewhere still as Prince Gigi, the dare-devil man of the world. It's great fun, and I don't know why I should pretend not to enjoy it. If there's anything that I hate and abominate, it is false modesty and affectation."

"They are indeed abominable qualities," I admitted. "I don't think you can ever be accused of them."

"I should hope not. . . . But now don't let's talk any more about me; I want to talk to you about yourself and your father. The poor old man has been telling me to-day the whole story of his misfortunes; of how you had to take French leave of your home in St. Petersburg, of the sort of life that you've been living here in Paris, and of the efforts that he's been making to bring his case and his wrongs to the notice of the Emperor. He's a great talker, as you know; and I've let him talk away to his heart's content all the afternoon. Among other things he told me of the unfortunate attachment you had formed for that young American painter. . . what's his name. . . ."

"*Prince Léonticheff!*" I cried. My heart was pounding, and my cheeks felt on fire. "Oh, how could my father have been so . . . !"

"So what? Why, your father was all right. He told it to me in the natural course of conversation, and I was very glad he did so, because . . ."

"I must beg you," I interrupted, trying to control my pain and my excitement, and to speak calmly and with dignity, "whatever my father may have said to you, I must beg you in the name of decency and delicacy, not to speak of it to me. I cannot listen to another word."

"Oh, come, now! Don't be angry. You must understand that I'm a good many years older than you, and besides that, I'm probably the best friend you and your father have got in the world. I think you're a little heroine, and I like you and respect you. What's more, I'm going to help you. The sort of life that you're leading here is all wrong, and wicked, and wasteful. You weren't born to spend your days giving music lessons, or translating fifth-rate novels. You'll never be young but once, and youth is too precious a thing to be allowed to slip away unused. I'm your true friend and your father's; and I'm going to help you. But first you must let me speak my mind freely and frankly, or else we can't reach any common ground of understanding. Now, then, to return to what I was going to say about your attachment for the young American painter. . . ."

My feelings of resentment, of outrage, of confusion, were so intense, I could hardly command my voice. It cost me a great effort to say, "I have asked you, Prince Léonticheff, not to speak to me of that. I do not know how I can prevent you, if you choose to take advantage of my helplessness to defy my wishes. I can't jump out of your carriage; I can't make myself deaf. But it does not seem to me exactly—I will not say gentlemanlike—but manly, on your part. I thought no one but a coward would take advantage of a woman's helplessness."

"Why, but look here. I'm not taking any advantage of you. What I want to say won't hurt you. On the contrary, it's something that will be entirely to your benefit to hear. It's of the highest possible importance that I should say it to you, for your father's sake. He asked me to say it to you. I said it to him, and he said he wished I would say the same thing to you. You . . ."

"Anything I need to hear for my father's sake, I prefer to hear from my father's lips. I must remind you that you are a stranger to me. I cannot allow you to speak to me about my private affairs."

"Oh, I say, Miss Banakin! You mustn't think of me as a stranger. I've known you ever since your childhood, and I'm your devoted friend. I am more anxious than I can tell you to be of use to you, to help your father to be reinstated in his rights as a Russian noble. But to that end there are certain things which it is absolutely necessary should be said. And I think it's weak and unworthy and unwomanly on your part to refuse to hear them, because they happen to be a little disagreeable. You tell me you'd rather hear them from your father. That's all very well, but, as he and I agreed this afternoon, you wouldn't believe them if your father said them to you. You'd doubt whether he knew what he was talking about; you'd think he was influenced in his opinions by his personal feelings. But you know that I have no personal feelings in the matter, and furthermore, that I can speak with authority, as one who knows. What I want to say won't hurt you. It's my duty as your friend to say it. Can't you sink your own little individual feelings for a moment, and look upon me as a sort of elder brother, and let me advise you? The amount of it is, I can't be of any earthly assistance to your father if I'm not to be allowed to say my say to you."

I bit my lips, and kept silence.

"You don't imagine, I hope," he went on, "that I am actuated by any other motive than a desire to serve you? It's delicate ground; and if it is painful for you to hear me, can't you understand that it isn't altogether delightful for me to have to say it? . . . Come, I want you to tell me what selfish motive I could possibly have."

"Oh, I suppose your motives are well enough," I answered, sullenly. "But there are some things that no motives can justify."

"Quite so. There are. And now do you want me to tell you one thing that no motive can justify? It's for a young girl, just for the sake of her small personal pleasure, to refuse to listen to a man who has matters of the highest importance to discuss with her."

I made no further resistance. Detestable as it would be for me to hear him, perhaps I had better do so. It was true, in a way, that I had no right to let my personal pleasure or displeasure stand between Prince Léonticheff and his willingness or his ability to serve my father. I was hot with hurt and shame and anger; but I sat motionless and speechless, keeping my eyes turned away from him, and tried to console myself by thinking that words break no bones.

"Now, then," he said, "I will be short and direct. I say of your attachment for the young American—I can't recall his name; something like West—I say its an unfortunate attachment; and so it is, for more reasons than one. It's unfortunate, first and foremost, because it can't possibly come to anything, the young man being penniless, and you being in a position where you can't afford to marry a poor man. It's furthermore unfortunate because, unless all signs fail, the young man has been inconstant; anyhow, he has stopped writing to you, and is allowing you to break your heart for him in solitude. But finally and chiefly, and if for no other reason, it's unfortunate, because the most effective step that you could take to damn eternally your father's cause in Russia would be to form an alliance with an American."

He paused a moment, as if to give this announcement time to sink into my brain. Then he continued. . . .

"You see, it's this way. Of course, what you and your father want to do more than anything else just now is to give the impression at Court, that in spite of the harsh and unjust treatment that you've received, you remain true and loyal subjects. Therefore you couldn't marry a foreigner without asking the Emperor's permission; and I can assure you of this—the Emperor would never sanction a marriage between your father's daughter and a citizen of the United States. If your father had kept his mouth shut, and refrained from committing his thoughts on the subject of republicanism to paper, it would be an entirely different matter. But among the manuscripts that were found in his possession when your house was searched, was a lucubration in which he declared a republic to be the only rational form of human government; and it was that which did as much as anything else to determine his condemnation to Siberia as an untrustworthy person. Well, now, if he applied for leave to marry his daughter to an American citizen, a republican *par excellence*, you may imagine the impression that would be made in Russia. No, no; you must give up thinking of your young American, you must cure yourself of your interest in him. You can do it, if you'll try. I know by experience that it's a possible, almost easy thing, to cure one's self of an affection that is inimical to one's welfare; and you must do it. . . . *V'là*, that's all I had to say on the subject of your love affair. You see it wasn't anything very terrible, and you've survived it."

He seemed to expect me to say something by way of rejoinder or acknowledgment, but as I held my tongue, he presently resumed. . . .

"For the rest, I may tell you in three words that I am going to cause you and Paul Mikhælovitch to be reinstated in all your rights and privileges at home. It's going to be a difficult, and no doubt a lengthy, undertaking. But I was never known to fail in anything I seriously attempted, and I don't mean to fail in this. If we don't succeed at once, we'll succeed later; and if one method fails us, we'll try another. But we'll win in the end. You were never born to be a poor miserable music-teacher on the wrong side of the Seine; you're too high-born and too high-bred, you're too pretty and too nice. You were born to shine in the great world, and to adorn a noble home. You see I'm blunt and bluff, and I don't mince matters or construct fine phrases. I speak out my mind in the first and the simplest words that come to me. But I want you to believe, Miss Banakin, that my heart is in the right place, and that I've conceived a deep and genuine fondness for you and your father, and that you may count upon me as your firm and devoted friend. I want to hear you say that you believe me."

"Oh, yes, I believe you," I said, awkwardly, and not too cordially.

"Good. Well, then, as I've told you, I'm going to put an end to the sort of life that circumstances are compelling you to lead at present. But first—and this is another point of supreme importance—first I've got to persuade you to join me in influencing your poor dear father to sacrifice something that's as precious to him as your young American painter was to you. You know what I mean?"

"No, I do not," I said.

"Why, this so-called History of Russia that he's been wasting his time over for I don't know how many years.

In the first place, there's only one man living who knows enough of it to write a History of Russia, and that man's not your father. But, in the second place, this thing that he has written would give mortal offence in the very quarter where he most needs to curry favor—I mean in the Imperial palace. Of course it's not likely that he could ever find a publisher insane enough to undertake the expense of printing it; but if he should, his last chance of pardon from the throne would be knocked from under him. He's been reading me scraps of it this afternoon, and explaining his point of view, and developing his little theories. I told him plainly that I thought he was mad. . . . Well, what I want you to do is to join me in urging him to burn it. When you've given up your young American painter, and your father has burned his so-called History of Russia, the rest will be, comparatively speaking, plain sailing."

My American painter! There was little need for me to give him up. It was he who had already given me up. Yet one by one the words that Prince Léonticheff spoke seemed to sink into my heart like drops of molten iron, burning out the last shred of hope that was left there, filling it with a deathly pain and despair.

Oh, Julian! Oh, God help me!

We found Armidis, and brought him away. Then we stopped at the Hôtel du St. Esprit for my father, and went to dine at the Restaurant Foyot. Somehow it seemed to me that I had never in all my life before been so unhappy as I was to-night. I could not have told why, perhaps, but it was so. Something cold and heavy, like a ball of ice, weighed in my breast and made it ache. It was as if I had received through some sixth sense a vague, occult warning of danger at hand, of approaching sorrow greater than any that I had known as yet. Armidis talked a vast deal to-night, but I could not interest myself in what he said, nor smile at his pleasantries. I remember, though, this little passage at arms between him and Prince Léonticheff.

The Prince cried out, "By Jove, you are the most amusing character I've ever met. I'm going to write a novel, just for the sake of putting you in."

"Your Serene Highness had better not attempt it," Armidis retorted. "It's been tried a great many times, but it can't be done. I am the rock upon which so many of my novel-writing friends have made shipwreck. I'm quite *insaisissable.*"

"Don't be too sure of that, my friend," said the Prince. "One of the remarkable facts about me—and you mustn't allow yourself to forget it—is that what I succeed in, most men have tried and failed in."

I believed Prince Léonticheff to be, for all his vulgarity, his self-conceit, his ponderosity, his lack of tact and humor, an honest, kind-hearted, well-meaning man, and a true friend and valuable ally of my father's. But to-night the sight of his fat face and burly figure, the sound of his unctuous, husky voice, were infinitely distasteful, even hateful, to me. I dare say it was not his fault, however. The light and the savor had gone out of the world. Everything was bitter or insipid to my palate. In my dull, sick languor the only thing I wished for—but for that I wished intensely—was to get away, home, in my own room, alone, alone with my dreary thoughts, my dead hopes, my bruised, bleeding love. It was, I suppose, the instinct of the sick animal to slink off and suffer its dull misery in hiding.

At last we rose from the table. Armidis and the Prince walked with us to the door of our hotel. There they bade us good-night, and went away together.

"*Eh bien*, my daughter, I consider my cause gained," said my father. "For only a little while longer shall we be forced to lead this wretched Bohemian existence. The Prince has come to our rescue, like the gallant nobleman he is. In a few weeks this shabby lodging-house will see the last of us. We shall be speeding toward St. Petersburg, in a *train de luxe*, there to resume our proper station in the world."

At these words, somehow, the grief that was pent up in me seemed to find an outlet. I burst into tears.

"Oh, father, father," I sobbed, "why should we make a change? Are we not well enough here? We have lived here so long, we are so accustomed to our way of living. We have plenty; we are not uncomfortable. The thought of breaking up, and going away, and making a change for the unknown—oh, it terrifies me. Let us be contented, and go on living our quiet, simple life. Oh, I wish Prince Léonticheff had never come to us. I wish we had never seen him. Let him go away, and leave us as he found us."

My father stood as still as a statue, and looked at me with amazement, with stupefaction, in his eyes.

At last he gave his head a toss, and cried, "What is this I hear? Is it that you do not know what you are saying? Is it that you are mad?"

"Oh, no, I am not mad. I know what I say, and I mean it. I can't bear the thought of this complete breaking up and changing of our life. It frightens me. I don't like Prince Léonticheff. I don't like to think of him entering into our private affairs, and determining them for us. It all makes me feel uneasy and full of terror. He may be a very good man in his way, but he is not of our kind. Oh, don't let us put ourselves under such an obligation to him. Oh, if he would only go away, if we only might never see him any more!"

"Well, if you are not mad," said my father, "then you are selfish to a degree that seems incredible. You, who are young and strong, you have adapted yourself to this that you call our quiet simple life; but which I call our mean, shabby, precarious life: a hand-to-mouth existence humbler than that of the smallest bourgeois. You have adapted yourself to it, you have even come, it appears, to like it, to enjoy it. But I . . . ? Can you not consider me a little? Just Heaven! Has my daughter sunken so low? And does she desire to bind me, to chain me, to her own low level?"

He ceased speaking for a few seconds, and marched backward and forward once or twice through the room. I sat still in my place, weeping silently. All at once he began again. . . .

"I must do you the justice of assuming that you have not thought, that you have not considered, that you have spoken upon the blind impulse of the moment. You are young and strong. But I . . . ? I am old, I am far from well. I grow appreciably older, I grow appreciably feebler, from day to day. My powers of resistance become daily less. From my cradle until I am fifty, I am habituated to every luxury that our Nineteenth Century civilization can procure: I have wealth, leisure, position, consideration; all the pleasantness of large fortune and high station are mine. Well and good. Then, suddenly, presto! I am deprived of all this. I find myself stripped, as it were, and sent naked into the world. For one, two, three, five, six years, I am constrained to live the life of an outlaw, an exile, a pauper, a Bohemian, a social nonentity. But do you imagine that I resign myself to the change? No, indeed, far from it. I support it as best I may, with patience, with dignity, uncomplainingly but never with resignation, until my hopes of regaining my rights become realizable, and I see then, so to speak, I see reinstatement and restoration, within arm's reach. I see myself returned to my own country, my own house, my home, my books, my properties; I see myself reestablished in my natural position among men, surrounded again by my friends, waited on by my servants, universally honored and respected; I see all this within arm's reach; but . . . ? What then? Lo! I find myself brought face to face with a new obstacle, the obstacle I had least foreseen: nothing less than the opposition of my daughter, of my own flesh and blood, *parbleu!* She would have me throw my opportunity out of the window, and voluntarily continue this dog's life. The viper that I have warmed in my bosom turns and stings me. Thoughtless, ungrateful child!"

"Yes, yes, you are quite right," I confessed, between my sobs. "I did not realize what I said. You forgive me? Oh, you must forgive me. I would never really oppose myself to anything that was for your good. It was just the feeling of the moment. The idea of a complete alteration in our life frightened me. And Prince Léonticheff . . . there is something about him that frightens me too, and makes me feel uncomfortable. But of course, you are right, and I was altogether wrong. Say that you forgive me. Won't you say it? Oh, if you are going to be angry with me, and not love me, what shall I do? You are all I have in the world. Oh, I am so lonesome, so unhappy!"

"Why, I believe you are hysterical," said my father. "There! Stop your crying. Dry your eyes. Love you? What a question to ask me! I should think you would know that my love for you is the ruling passion of my life. There, there, my dear! You see it is telling upon you, as well as upon me, this life of hardship and privation. It is consuming away your youth, it is wearing you out. It is ageing you before your time. You have not been yourself for these many weeks. You are losing your color, your freshness, your vivacity. The new life, the life of ease and luxury, that is about to open before us, will be as much to your benefit as to mine. Now go to bed, and sleep. Good-night."

IV.

My conception of the character of Prince Léonticheff was a good deal complicated and confused by my reading of the manuscript novel that he had left with me. I could not quite agree with him in regarding it as the most poetical thing in English prose, "or in German, either;" nor could I share his belief that Goethe would have given all he ever wrote for the central idea or theme. But, nevertheless, it struck me as an exceedingly pretty story, extremely well wrought out. It was graceful and delicate in form, tender and refined in feeling, original in plan, and thoroughly interesting. It seemed to me to reveal a fine imagination, a peculiarly genuine insight into human nature, and a point of view that was at once lofty and enlightened. That absence of humor which was so grotesquely distinctive of the author's personality, I did not feel in his work: perhaps because the story he had to tell—a tragical romance of the middle ages—was not one that called for humorous treatment.

How Prince Léonticheff could ever have written it was the problem that baffled me. Suppose I had discovered a cabbage-stalk bearing lilies of the valley? Before I had read his novel, I should have said, if anybody had asked me to describe him, "He is, for all his noble pedigree, a big, lazy, heavy Russian mouzhik. He is well informed upon certain subjects, he is shrewd, he has plenty of rough and ready mother-wit; but he is vulgar, vain, and boastful to a degree that would seem to indicate some congenital weakness in his brain; he is intolerably wearisome; and he is absolutely deficient in imagination, in sensibility, in tact and delicacy, in all those faculties and instincts which are called æsthetic. He is the bull in the china-shop, but a good-natured bull, it must be confessed."

What, however, could I say of him now?

It was as if the bull had suddenly displayed an ability to sing like a nightingale. All my calculations were upset.

My father said, "The rough cloak has a silken lining."

"Bah-bah!" cried Armidis. "He hires some poor devil of a clever fellow to write for him; then he signs the product with his princely name, and reaps the glory of it. Don't tell *me!*"

Armidis, I thought, was perversely unjust to the Prince. He had made up his mind to see nothing good in him, to believe nothing but evil of him.

I accepted my father's metaphor, and said with him, "The rough cloak has a silken lining."

We saw the Prince every day. He was always calling upon us at our hotel, having us to lunch with him, to dine with him, taking us to drive, sending us handsomely bound copies of his works, sending us wines, fruits, and big baskets of flowers that looked queer and out of place in our small dingy quarters. If he had sent us cut flowers, it would have been different; but the vast, stiff, conventional baskets that he did send, made my father's little room resemble the *loge* of a prima-donna.

For my part, I found his constant and profuse attentions inexplicable as well as embarrassing. Why should he neglect all the other people he knew in Paris, to devote himself exclusively to us? And not to speak of the larger service that he had undertaken to render my father, here he was daily overwhelming us with smaller favors for which we were in no position to render an equivalent. I could not understand it; it troubled me, and made me feel uncomfortable and ill at ease.

One day Armidis said to me—my father had gone with his Serene Highness to some races at Longchamps; and the composer had taken me to dine with him on the other side of the river—he said, "I am going to talk very seriously to you for a few minutes, Monica Paulovna. To begin with, answer me this: don't you think I am really the most forbearing and long-suffering friend that ever was?"

"I think you are the best and dearest friend," I responded. "But what do you mean by long-suffering and forbearing?"

"Why, the way I stick to you through—or rather, in spite of—thick and thin."

"*Through* thick and thin, indeed. But how in spite of?"

"Oh, dear me! You literal thing! So dense, and so unkind! To make a man explain his little metaphors! . . . Your father's thin, isn't he? And heaven knows, your Prince is thick."

I could not help smiling, though I tried to speak with great severity, when I said, "I have told you before, and I wish you would remember it, that I cannot allow you to abuse my father. As for the Prince, I am no partisan of his, but you are utterly unjust to him. He is a very harmless person; uncouth, uncivilized, if you please, and dreadfully tedious; but thoroughly well-meaning and kind-hearted. And though he says stupid and vulgar things, he writes very well indeed. You have taken a dislike to him, a prejudice against him; and you are determined to believe nothing but evil of him. It's unworthy of you."

"Oh, dear me! What a crusher! I feel quite blasted. You pitiless, unfeeling creature! . . . However, I have a duty to discharge, and I'll discharge it, no matter what it costs me. Only, please don't stare at me in quite such a stony way. It disconcerts me, and saps my courage. . . . Let me see. . . . Where shall I begin?"

He paused for an instant, and looked at me with one of his bright, irresistible smiles: a smile like that of a naughty but charming child, eager to be taken back into your good graces, but not by any means willing to promise to sin no more: a smile against which no rancor could be proof. He looked at me thus, until he saw that my own face was melting, whether I would or not; and then he went on. . . .

"There! That is better, and so much more becoming. Now, what I am in duty bound to say to you is this: If I did not know you to be entirely incapable of such a thing I should accuse you of carrying on the most desperate sort of a flirtation with Prince Léonticheff."

"Mr. Armidis!" I cried in anger and amazement.

"Oh, don't. Don't Mr. Armidis me. I haven't done anything to deserve it. I tell you in my very first breath that I know you to be incapable of such a thing. I was only warning you of what I might say if I knew you less well, of what a stranger, witnessing your attitude toward the Prince, might say, of what, in fine, the Prince himself very likely thinks. I know you're not flirting with him; but he, I'll bet my head, believes you are. Now wait a moment. Don't fling out at me. Contain yourself, and let me explain. The Prince, in one word, is making desperate love to you; and you are suffering him to do so unrebuked. The real reason is, you're so innocent and unsophisticated that you've never suspected what he was up to. But he doesn't know that, and he naturally thinks you like it."

"The Prince making love to me! What an absurd idea!" I cried.

"Yes; isn't it? Entirely absurd; quite so; preposterous. We're altogether of one mind concerning that, I'm rejoiced to learn. But absurd as it is, it's so. Now listen to me. You're a woman, a young—comparatively speaking, a young—unmarried woman. You've had scarcely any experience of the world, and none of men. What men have you ever known? Your father, Julian North, and poor old Armidis, the composer. Well, my dear, they don't any of them count. Each is an exception to the rules. But your horrid old Léonticheff! There's an average man, a typical man . . . "

"Prince Léonticheff a typical man!" I could not help interrupting. "If there ever was an exception, it seems to me he is one."

"Oh, for that, yes," assented Armidis. "Also an exception in certain little superficial ways; but on the whole and under his skin, a fair average specimen of brute beast called man for short. An average specimen in that he has the average passions, appetites, weaknesses, and code of morals. Well and good. You don't know the species; I do. You are at a loss how to construe its actions; to me they speak louder than words. Now when I see an individual of the stripe of Prince Léonticheff devoting himself to a young and pretty woman as he's devoting himself to Miss Banakin, I know that his designs are not platonic. I know that he is making love to her with malice aforethought. And, what is more, I know that, seeing that she doesn't resent his advances, or snub him, or put him back in his place, he believes that she likes it and is encouraging him, leading him on, and meeting him half way . . . "

"But he is *not* devoting himself to me," I protested.

"Oh, he's not devoting himself to you? No? Really? Oh, then I crave a thousand pardons. I thought he was. I thought he came to see you every day, and took you driving nearly every day, and sent you flowers and books and things every other day, and was never content unless you were dining or lunching with him, and that sort of thing. Somehow I had acquired that impression . . . "

"It is my father. He comes to see my father," I began . . .

"Your father? Oh, wow-wow! Your father's very nice, perhaps; it's a matter of taste, and perhaps he's very nice. Yes, as a famous statesman used to say, I've no doubt that for the people who like that sort of man, he'd be just about the sort of man they'd like. But somehow as the world is constituted, young men don't conceive such insatiable passions for fathers; no, generally daughters. And then consider! He scarcely speaks to your father. He has no eyes, nor ears, nor tongue for anyone but you. He glues himself to you like a tame rhinoceros. Oh, believe me, I know the type. The Prince is wooing you. And he flatters himself that you encourage him. I can't altogether blame him. You pale women with the red hair are the devil and all where men's hearts are concerned. But I do blame you a little. You ought to pour some cold water down his patrician back. You ought not to let him fancy that he's made an impression. If you don't look sharp, he'll marry you. There! I have spoken."

"No, no, you are talking nonsense," I rejoined. "Prince Léonticheff has never said or done or hinted anything in the least degree sentimental. If he seems devoted, it's only his way; it doesn't mean anything at all. I will confess to you that I do not relish his attentions. They embarrass me horribly, and make me feel uncomfortable and disagreeable. The books, the flowers, the dinners, the drives, the constant visits, his general eagerness to please us, to serve us, they make me squirm; I wish he would stop. But what can I do? I mustn't offend him. For my father's sake, I mustn't offend him. What can I do? What would you have me do?"

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure. I'm not a woman. I can warn you, I can put you on your guard; but I can't tell you how to defend yourself. That's a woman's business. I thought I had read somewhere, or heard a rumor, to the effect that women generally know without being taught how to assert their dignity, and put a too presuming suitor back into his place. I thought women knew how to do this by a sort of instinct. I thought they had a method all their own by which, quietly, gracefully, with an air of unconsciousness, to wrap round a man a beautiful, filmy, delicate, but very cold wet blanket. Search within thyself. All I can say is that your horrid old Russian Prince has designs upon you. If they are not honorable designs, which is entirely possible, *je me'en fiche!* In that case, I know he is in no wise to be feared. Only I should like to see you shrivel him up with your scorn. But if his designs *are* honorable, which somehow seems most likely — why, then, I tremble. Your dear delightful papa's little ambition will be realized; and heaven pity Monica Paulovna."

"My father's ambition? What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing to speak of. Your father's ambition is simple, natural, and unpretentious. He aspires to marry you to the Prince."

"Oh, that is too absurd!"

"All the same, it is the fact."

"Never, never. My father's not a fool. He knows in the first place that I will never marry anyone. In the second place, he can see with his eyes shut that no two people could possibly be more unsuited to each other than Prince Léonticheff and I. And in the third place, he knows that a Prince of the Empire isn't likely to ask me to be his wife. He can pretend to the highest."

"Even so! Your father's not a fool. Therefore he sees, as I do, that your Prince is tremendously smitten by your charms; he realizes that from a worldly point of view such a marriage would be immensely brilliant and advantageous: wealth, rank, a title, position, power, everything that a worldling's heart can desire, at one fell swoop! And if you were not related to him, I should tell you that your dear papa is very far from being above worldly considerations. Nothing this side of Paradise could give him such joyous satisfaction as an alliance between his daughter and the Prince Léonticheff. As for Julian, poor lad, whom I fancy you had in mind when you said you wouldn't marry anyone, your father regards him as quite out of the running. Indeed, he never regarded him as in it; and if he was suave and amiable in dealing with him, it was only to get rid of him the more easily. Nothing that your father ever did increased my appreciation of the solid diplomatic worth that lies under the surface of his guileless-seeming character, as did the adroit and noiseless manner in which he sent Julian North packing off into the wilderness. Let the Prince once declare his intentions, and then watch Paul the son of Michael. The worst of it is, I am afraid you will be weak and obedient."

"You needn't be afraid of that, if it ever comes to the point. I did not know you had so poor an opinion of me."

"Well, we'll see, we'll see. Don't boast; it brings bad luck. Your father has charms to move the filial breast. He's not a man to stick at a trifle, and neither is your Prince. If they conspire together to make a bride of you—beware, beware! I wish to speak moderately, without passion, without prejudice, and therefore I will say nothing more disparaging of Prince Léonticheff than that he is the most colossal mass of swinish selfishness that I could ever have imagined possible in my worst nightmares. So long as his appetites are satisfied, he smiles and is content. But heaven help the man, woman, or child, that stands between him and the object his mouth waters for! You might as reasonably look for mercy from a hungry tiger, courtesy from an anaconda, compunction from an escaped locomotive."

"Prince Léonticheff is not one hundredth part so black as you paint him. I am not by any means his champion or admirer, but I can't understand why you should be so persistently unjust to him."

"Unjust, say you? Now, look you, Monica Banakin, I will endure well-nigh anything from you, because I love you. But I will not endure to hear you call me unjust on the score of your Russian Prince. Anything but that. I have had opportunities of judging him which have been denied to you. I have spent several unhappy hours quite alone with him, *en tête-à-tête*, listening to his free and guileless prattle. I have heard him deliver his mind on various themes, human and otherwise, with a degree of candor and unreserve which even he could scarcely employ in the presence of a young unmarried woman. Now, then, I maintain that I am not merely just, but that I temper justice with mercy, when I call Prince Léonticheff the most appalling monster of gross egotism that I have ever encountered. I maintain that I speak with gratuitous temperance when I allude to him as the most odious cad that has ever entered my horizon. Far be it from me to blacken his fair fame; therefore I will say nothing further, except that in his conversation, and, by his own accounts, in his life as well, he is an indecent beast. If you ask me to classify him zoölogically, I will add that he seems to me a cross between a boa-constrictor and a pig. You see, I hold myself within bounds. There is no villainy, no cruelty, no bestiality of which he would be incapable, if it suited his desire. . . . Now, my dear, I want you to snub him. Do it gentle, do it discreetly, but do it firmly. Put him back in his place, and let him stay there. That's all. I have said my little say. Now let's banish him from our thoughts. He takes away my appetite, and his name in my mouth tastes bitter."

Was Prince Léonticheff so bad as Armidis pretended? I could not believe it. The very excess of superlatives with which Armidis loaded him, shook my confidence in the speaker's judgment.

As for his suggestion that the Prince wanted to marry me, it was too utterly absurd to deserve a second thought.

V.

It was too utterly absurd to deserve a second thought; and yet . . .

And yet, within a six-month, I became the Princess Léonticheff.

I must explain, if I can, how step by step I was brought to do so. I say, "If I can," because, when I think of it now, it seems so inexplicable to me, so contrary to all naturalness and verisimilitude, that I should declare it to be impossible, the shadow of a bad dream, if I did not, unhappily, know it to be a most substantial fact.

Armidis had said, "If you don't look sharp, he'll marry you."

To which I had responded, "Nonsense! He has never said or done or hinted anything in the least degree sentimental."

The next day he asked me to be his wife.

Toward five o'clock in the afternoon he called upon us, and announced that he had come to take me off for a drive.

"Your father permits. I want to talk to you about something important. Go make ready."

I would much rather have stayed at home. In the first place, the prospect of a long *tête-à-tête* with him looked wearisome and uninviting. In the second place, though I did not believe that Armidis's assertions of yesterday rested upon the slightest foundation of truth, they had had, nevertheless, the effect of making me feel conscious and ill at ease in Prince Léonticheff's presence, and I did not care to be alone with him. Yet, on the other hand, if I should refuse to go, he might take it amiss; whereas, for my father's sake, I must avoid unnecessarily offending him. And then, perhaps, the "something important" concerning which he wished to speak with me, was some aspect of my father's affair which he could not mention in my father's presence.

This last consideration played the chief part in determining me. I went to my room, and put on my hat and gloves.

The Prince's Victoria was in waiting in the street.

"Well," said the Prince, as soon as we were fairly off, "I've had news from Russia."

He paused. I did not speak, but waited expectantly for his next word.

"Do you mind my smoking a cigarette? Thank you . . . Yes, I've had news from Russia; and, not to beat about the bush, bad news at that."

He paused again; and I, feeling that some response was expected from me, repeated, "Bad news . . . ?" with a suspension of the voice that meant, "Yes. Go on. Tell me, quick."

"I thought," he went on, "that I would confide it to you in the first place, and then afterward break it to your father. Poor old chap, he's worked himself up to such a pitch of hopeful excitement, a set-back now might play the devil with him."

"Yes. That was very considerate of you."

"Oh, not at all. You see, I felt that it might make him downright ill. Besides, after you and I have had a talk together, perhaps the whole complexion of the news may be changed. We may be able between us to extract the venom from it."

Would he never come to his point? "The news is . . . ?" I questioned.

"Well, here . . . I don't remember whether I told you that I had written to a friend of mine at St. Petersburg—a man who stands wonderfully near the throne—that I had written to him to find out whether or not the Emperor had any personal feeling against your father. It was of the highest importance for me to be informed as to that. It would determine, so to speak, my method of attack. If he had no knowledge of the affair, or feeling in regard to it, except officially, then I would go to work in one way. If, on the other hand, he felt in any degree personally aggrieved against the old boy—why, then, naturally, my tactics would be entirely different."

"Yes, I remember, you told me you had written. And now you have had an answer from your friend?"

"Exactly. I got a letter from him this morning. And to cut a long story short, he says that, as ill luck will have it, the Emperor bears the strongest sense of personal injury. It appears that, when, soon after his accession, your father's partisans brought his case to the Emperor's notice, and began to plead with him for a pardon, he, like the sensible man he is, asked to see the documents bearing upon the matter; and the manuscripts found in your father's possession were handed to him; and he read them. Now, I don't want to cast any reflection upon your father. I like him, and I esteem him as a man with a certain sort of intelligence. But you must allow me to say that in some respects he's little better than a fool. Fancy, if you please, that among these manuscripts there was one, written—as, for the matter of that, they all were, at a time when Alexander III. was still the Tsarevitch, which consisted of a series of not very flattering predictions as to what policy he would probably pursue upon coming to the throne; and his Majesty read that, and it didn't please him. What under God's heaven ever induced your father to write it, is more than I can tell. It was as needless and as purposeless as it was dangerous and idiotic. But there it lay in black and white, all nicely dated, and signed with your father's name. His Majesty read it, and he didn't like it. And, weary of the importunities of your father's friends, he dropped a hint that he would make it uncommonly disagreeable for any person who might thereafter mention Paul Mikhaelovitch Banakin's name in his presence. 'I must live up to the reputation he has given me,' was his imperial little *mot.* And my correspondent adds that it would be highly imprudent even for me to seek to approach him on the subject; that I would run a considerable risk of getting into his bad books, and losing my standing and favor at the Court."

The Prince turned his broad red face full upon me, and closed one eye, and smiled.

"Then," said I—and I was conscious of a strange and altogether unjustifiable sense of relief—"then it is a hopeless case? My father's affairs will have to remain as they are?"

"Not so fast, not so fast," returned the Prince. "I didn't say it was a hopeless case. What can't be done by hook, can perhaps be done by crook. In fact, to put the long and the short of the matter in five words, from this moment the success or failure of the whole enterprise depends solely upon you."

"Upon me?"

"Quite so. Upon you."

"But how? I don't see how. What can I do?"

"That's just what I am going to tell you. It was to tell you that, that I asked you out to drive with me. Well, it's this way. If I approach the Emperor on the subject of your father's wrongs, says my friend, I run the risk of angering him, and of losing my standing and favor at Court. Well, that's a pretty big, a pretty serious risk to run, isn't it? Rather, you say. And if you know anything about human nature, you know that a man in his senses isn't likely to run a risk of that sort, unless there's a prize at the other end of it. A sane man isn't going to run a risk like that out of pure benevolence. Now, I'm a wonderfully good-natured fellow, as you must have seen; and I'd do a good deal, and risk a good deal, just from sheer kindness of heart. But not my standing and favor with the Father of his People. I stop just short of that. That is too precious to me. Considerably more than half my influence and usefulness in this world springs from that. I can't risk it, except for the chance of a big reward. Now, then, my dear Mademoiselle, it's for you to guarantee me my reward."

For me to guarantee him his reward!

Suddenly I grew cold to the very marrow of my bones; and a tremor of fear and nervousness seized upon me. I turned my face from the Prince, and looked into the street from the other side of the carriage. Oh, if I could only escape, and get away from him, out of his sight, beyond the sound of his voice, alone, anywhere, to avoid what I doubted not was coming! That was the only thought or feeling that would take shape in my mind.

"You see what I mean," he went on. "You must promise to marry me. I consider that an adequate *quid pro quo.* You betroth yourself to me. Then I make a little run into Russia, and obtain an audience of the Emperor, and brave his wrath, and plead your father's cause. I believe I shall not plead in vain. It may be hard work, a pull against the tide, and all that. But I think I can assure you that I will not come away till I have got an imperial pardon for the old boy in my pocket. At the same time I will crave his Majesty's sanction for our marriage. I dare say I have told you that I make it a practice never to fail in anything that I seriously undertake. There, now; I expect you to consider yourself from this hour my *fiancée* . . . What have you to answer?"

What had I to answer! My thoughts were in such turmoil and confusion, I could not find words for my answer, the only answer that I had to make. And even if the words had come to me, my heart was beating so hard, I doubt if I could have spoken them. All at once a fierce hatred of the Prince had seemed to grow big, and burn within me; a hot, savage anger. Oh, if I could only jump from the carriage, and run away, and never see his face, nor hear his voice, again so long as I lived! I kept my back turned toward him, and bit my lips, and was speechless. I remembered what Armidis had said, that women generally knew by instinct how to silence an unwelcome suitor; and I wondered bitterly why that instinct was denied to me.

"Yes," the Prince continued, in his fat, complacent manner, "you and I must become engaged. You say you don't love me. I know you say that, though you don't open your lips, because you're a young girl, and all young girls have romantic and sentimental ideas about love and marriage. You say you don't love me; but the important question is, What do I say? I say, Never mind. I say also that it is only a question of time when you will love me. I never yet knew—this is strictly between ourselves—I never yet knew a woman who could help loving me, if I seriously tried to make her. And—again between you and me—I suppose I've made love to, and been loved by, something like two hundred women in the last ten years. Yes, two hundred would be a moderate estimate, a very moderate estimate indeed. All sorts and conditions of women, too, mind you; from all ranks of life; of all ages between eighteen and thirty-five; of pretty nearly all nationalities—French and English, Russian and German, Italian and Spanish, even Turkish women, Greeks, and Jewesses. Oh, but not with a view to matrimony; no, no, no. You're the one single woman on the face of this planet whom I have looked at with the idea of inviting her to become my wife. You say you don't love me; and I say never mind, for the present. Love isn't necessary to begin a marriage with. The necessary capital to begin with is respect and liking. Now, I'm quite sure that you respect me and like me. You can't help doing so, because you're a fair-minded, sensible woman, and I'm a thoroughly likeable man, and thoroughly worthy of respect. Very good; you marry me with your respect and liking as a basis. If I'm satisfied, I don't see that anybody else is called upon to complain. As for love, that will come; you may safely leave that to me. For my own part, I not only respect and like you, but I am free to say that I've conceived for you the most violent passion that I have ever felt for any woman in my life. And from the first day I saw you here in Paris, a few weeks ago, I confess, I've realized that you were the woman designed by heaven to be my wife. My wife has got to be, first of all, a Russian; and you're a Russian. Then she's got to be noble, and you belong to one of the oldest noble families in the Empire. You might expect me to say that she's got to be rich, too; but I'm rich enough myself to dispense with a *dot* from my bride, if I choose. Then she's got to be pretty; and to say no more, your appearance and style suit me better than those of any other woman I've ever seen. Finally she's got to be clever and intellectual; and you're that, beyond any sort of question. So! I've thought it all over carefully and from every point of view; and I've decided to make you the Princess Léonticheff. You may take that as a great tribute to your charms, in more ways than one. Not to mention the magnificent rank to which I offer to raise you, you must understand that I'm a very difficult and critical man, extremely hard to please. What's more, until I saw you, I had always said I shouldn't even think of marriage till I was past forty. But directly I did see you, it was all up with me. You took me captive at once. . . I'm going to speak to your father about it as soon as we return from this drive. I tell you, you will wear your new dignity like one to the manner born! I can just see you — Madame la Princesse, ruling it over Salchester House, wearing the Léonticheff jewels, surrounded by admiring people, a very Queen, by Jove! You were born for luxury, and I'm going to give it to you. You can't imagine how proud of you I'll be! What with your own natural beauty, and the sumptuous setting I'll provide for it, the people will turn and stare at you wherever you go; and how they'll envy me!"

Was ever woman in this humor wooed?

At last I found my voice, though it was a weak voice and tremulous, I am afraid.

"I assure you, Prince Léonticheff," I said, "that I can never under any circumstances become your wife. Will you—will you be good enough to tell your coachman to drive home?"

"Of course," he rejoined, composedly, "it strikes you as unlikely, even as impossible, at a first glance. But when you come to think it over, you'll conclude that it's not only possible, it's inevitable. I myself, I don't mind owning, when the idea first occurred to me, I scouted it as absurd. 'Pshaw!' I said. 'You don't want to get married, my good fellow. You don't want to sacrifice all the independence and irresponsibility of bachelorhood, just for the sake of calling a pretty woman by your name. Nonsense!' But gradually the idea grew upon me, grew upon me; and by and by I woke up to recognize it as a case of willy-nilly. You've inspired me with a passion so deep and violent that I shan't know any sort of peace till I've made you my own; and I've got too much respect both for you and your father to look at you with any idea in my head save that of honorable matrimony. You've taken such a hold upon my heart and upon my imagination that I can't think or dream of anything else. It surprises you, perhaps; but it can't begin to surprise you as it surprises me. I never would have believed that I was capable of such a terribly serious attachment. I've had so many little unmeaning fancies and amourettes, that I had rather come to regard myself as proof against anything more fatal. But here I am, completely undone and knocked under by your loveliness. You see, there's no escaping it. We'll have to get married. I'll make a formal demand for your hand of your father when we return to the Hôtel du St. Esprit. Now, if you like, we may change the subject."

"I wish to tell you, Prince Léonticheff," I said, "although you do not appear to pay any attention to what I tell you, that I will never become your wife. Nothing that you can say or do, nothing that anybody can say or do, nothing that can possibly happen, can ever induce me to become your wife. Nothing. I beg of you to accept that as my final answer. I must also beg you never to speak to me of this again, and not to speak of it to my father. It will do no good for you to speak of it to him; it will only bring trouble to him and me, without at all altering my resolution; it will only bring trouble and struggle. You have spoken to me to-day in a very unusual way; you have said things to me that most women would find intolerably offensive and insulting. But in spite of all that, I still believe you to be a man of kind natural feelings, and that you are only lacking in tact and imagination. If you do not wish me to think worse of you, you will obey my wishes in this respect, without my saying anything more."

"That illustrates perfectly the point that I was making. It will take you some time to accustom yourself to the idea. At first it seems impossible to you; and it frets you, it disturbs you. As for my being a man of kind feelings, of course I am. I am the kindest man you know, and the best friend you've got in the world. You can see for yourself how anxious I am to serve you, you and your father. And if you consider it insulting for me to speak of a *quid pro quo*—why, look here. You can't expect a man to put his head into the lion's mouth, so to speak, for mere acquaintance' sake, can you? You can hardly expect me to run the risk of disgracing myself at Court out of pure abstract altruism. But for my future wife, and my future father-in-law—ah, that's a very different matter. You see, I hate cant, and I talk to you with a degree of honesty that may seem brutal, but which is natural and proper. For the rest, I leave you to perceive unaided how in every way this offer of marriage from me to you is to your advantage. I am a modest man, and I shan't dwell on that. Anyhow, it's too obvious; to do so would be to insult your intelligence. I will only say that there is no unmarried woman in Europe, under the blood-royal, who wouldn't jump at a chance to become the Princess Léonticheff, and I may add that an alliance with royalty itself wouldn't be too high a thing for me to look to, if I cared for it. I'm no mere puny Russian Prince, you must remember; I'm a Prince of the Empire. I'm one of the richest men in Europe, at the same time, and one of the ablest writers. Why, if I ask a woman to marry me, she ought to go about all the rest of her mortal days thanking her stars for her luck. It isn't conceivable that any woman in cold blood should refuse me. Why, if I told you the names of some of the families in Russia, in England, in Prussia, in France, that have flung their daughters at my head, you'd be amazed, you could hardly credit it. I'm his Serene Highness Prince Léonticheff; don't allow yourself to forget that. . . . It may not be so clear to you how the union I propose will be equally to my advantage, but that's only because you don't understand yet how fond I am of you. My heart is set upon you, and when my heart is set upon a thing I must have it. Yes, the thing is inevitable, it's bound to be. You must make up your mind to it. You must think it over, and try to realize the grand good fortune that has happened to you. All unmarried Europe will envy you. But apart from that, you're not going to set yourself up as the single obstacle between your father and his chances of restoration to his rights in Russia; you couldn't find it in you to do that. And I--I'm not going to let you, the prettiest and the sweetest woman I've ever known, and the woman I've fallen desperately in love with, I'm not going to let you continue to slave your youth away as a music-teaching drudge here in Paris. It isn't right; it must be stopped; it's gone on six years too long already. Your father tells me, and I'm able to see for myself, that it's gradually wearing you out. Your strength is failing you. Why, he says, you've grown visibly thin and pallid even during the last few months. He's very seriously alarmed about you; and if you were wise, you'd be alarmed about yourself. Suppose your health should give out? Here you are, so to speak, the sole prop your poor old father has to lean upon, his breadwinner, his nurse, his comforter. Well, suppose your health should break down? Eh? Where would he be? And if you have to go on drudging and worrying very much longer, your health *will* break down, and then there'll be the devil to pay. No; what you must do is written upon the walls; marry Prince

Gigi. Then your father will be re-established in the possession of his own properties; and you'll have a rich husband to take care of you, and protect you from all harm. That's my last word for the present. It is understood that you and I are engaged."

"Prince Léonticheff, will you be so good as to tell your coachman to drive home?" I demanded.

"Stonehouse!" he called out. "Back to the Rue St. Jacques."

We finished our drive in silence. To me it seemed to last hours and hours. When it was over I went straight to my room, leaving Prince Léonticheff to join my father in his.

VI.

I WENT straight to my room, and locked my door behind me.

Exhausted, unnerved, unstrung, I flung myself upon my bed, and closed my eyes. In my weakness, I could not shake off a feeling like terror, as if I were in some immediate, imminent peril. I could not shake it off, though I knew perfectly well that it was unreasonable and groundless; and it afforded me a sense of security and relief to think that my door was locked.

Never to see Prince Léonticheff again! Never again to hear his voice, feel his presence! I was surfeited with him. The mere thought of him filled me with sickening disgust. I remember I said to myself, "I will not leave this room until I can do so without the slightest risk of having to meet him. No, not until I know that he has gone away from Paris." It did not occur to me how difficult, how impossible, of performance this vow might prove to be. It struck me as the simplest, the easiest, thing in the world, just to shut myself up in my room, and refuse to open my door, until I was persuaded that Prince Léonticheff had gone away from Paris.

And then—my father! I was oppressed by a great weary dread of the struggle which I knew I should presently have to undertake and carry on with my father. I had told the Prince that I would never become his wife, that nothing conceivable could ever induce me to become his wife; and it had been, comparatively speaking, easy for me to say that to him. But I knew that I should presently have to repeat it to my father, to repeat it and maintain it, and from that prospect I shrank fatigued beforehand, as from a labor far beyond my strength.

I did not see my father again that evening. He came to my door, it is true, and rapped, and said it was time to go to dinner.

"We have been waiting for you. Why do you delay? Make haste."

But I answered that I had a headache, and was tired, and did not want any dinner; and rather to my surprise, and very much to my relief, he went away without insisting.

In the morning, however, I said to myself, "What must be must be. I have got to have it out with him sooner or later. Nothing can be gained by putting it off. On the contrary, it is best to nip the thing in its bud. They can't make me marry him by main force. This notion of staying in my room is quite impracticable; I have things to do. Besides, it would give the affair too much importance; it would be a confession of weakness and of fear of them. I must put on a bold front, I must seem absolutely determined, and absolutely confident of my own strength. Come!"

So I plucked up my courage, and went down to my father's room. My teeth were set, and my fingers were clenched, but my heart was beating so hard that it pained me.

My father greeted me kindly, and with a certain air of gay raillery.

"Ah, *ma fille!*" he cried, patting my cheek, and laughing into my eyes. "Our headache is better? We have slept it off? *Allons! Pas de mauvaise honte!* Confess! It was but a little ruse, a little innocent transparent ruse, whereby to hide our blushes? Eh? Eh?"

He paused, and looked at me with a face all smiles. Then he made a bow, and said, "But I forget my duties. Princess, receive my felicitations."

I stood still, and summoned all my self-command, and asked, "Prince Léonticheff has told you what he said to me yesterday?" But my voice trembled, and betrayed my nervousness.

"Naturally! He could scarcely have done less. And why otherwise should I offer you my felicitations? . . . Ah, Monica, in my wildest dreams I have never dared to hope for you anything approaching in brilliancy this destiny that has actually laid itself at your feet. You are indeed a charming girl, and now your charms have made your fortune for you, and mine for me. And wasn't it a lucky day for us when I read Léonticheff's name in *Figaro?* Madame la Princesse! Indeed, you deserve it, my dear, you are in every way worthy of it. It is heaven's compensation to you, to us, for all that we have been called upon to suffer during the last six years."

"But I should suppose that he must also have told you of the answer that I gave him," I said, coldly.

"*Olàlà!* That doesn't matter. Piff-paff! Whatever you may have answered on the spur of the moment, in the flush of your emotion and surprise, is of no consequence. To an offer such as his there is of course but one final answer. A Princess of the Empire! It simply overwhelms me. I know not how to express my joy and my gratitude."

"Well, father, I only wish to repeat to you what I said to the Prince. The answer I made on the spur of the moment will be my final answer. I will never marry him, never. Nothing in the world can ever bring me to marry him. Absolutely nothing. There is no man living whom I would not rather marry, if I had to marry at all. I wish to say this to you now, at the very beginning, so that you may understand it, and not get your heart set on the impossible, and so store up a disappointment for yourself. I will never under any conceivable circumstances marry him. It will be absolutely useless for you to try to persuade me. There is nothing imaginable that I would not rather do. I would far rather, far rather, die. If there were no other way of escaping him, I would kill myself without a moment's hesitation. But there is no danger of its coming to that. I simply will never consent to be his wife; and even if he could drag me by force to the altar, no priest will marry a woman without her consent. That is all. I feel that it is my duty to warn you of that at the very outset."

My father looked at me with a tolerant, incredulous smile; such a smile as one might wear in listening to the boasting of some silly child. In the end he gave a gentle little laugh.

"Poh, poh, poh!" he cried, cheerfully, with a jaunty shrug and gesture. "Say what you please, my dear; I allow you complete freedom of speech, so long as you don't let it affect your behavior. Say what you please; but you are not an imbecile, and I am quite sure you will do the proper thing. You have very good brains in your little head, and a very good heart in your little bosom, though sometimes you make very foolish and very naughty speeches."

"Well, I have said all I had to say," I repeated. "I will never marry Prince Léonticheff. I have given you fair warning. It is for you to accept it in your own good time."

"No, you are neither an imbecile, nor—nor a little selfish cat. It would be the part of an imbecile to let pass this most dazzling opportunity. But it would be the part of a black-hearted, cold-blooded egoist to stand between her father and the realization of his most cherished wish—to constitute herself the sole obstacle to his receiving his rights at the hands of justice. Léonticheff is one of the richest, one of the most illustrious, and one of the most powerful members of the noblesse of Europe; at the same time he is a man of the kindest and most chivalrous nature, a man of intellect, and a man precisely suited to you in point of years. You are not such a fool as to throw away a chance to unite yourself in marriage to a man like that. It is the sort of chance that comes but to one woman in a million once in a generation. But, what is more, you are aware that my hopes of restoration to my rights in Russia all depend upon your betrothing yourself to him. You, my daughter, my own flesh and blood, are not going to set yourself up as the sole impediment to my success? You are not so abominably selfish and ungrateful as that."

"Yes, I know that the Prince would like me to be the price of his services to you. He was frank enough to tell me so. He said that he would consider me an adequate *quid pro quo.* I appreciate the compliment; but thank you, no!"

"What an unworthy speech! So to misrepresent the motives and intentions of a most honorable gentleman! Can't you see that it was a piece of gratuitous delicacy on his part, knowing that the marriage he proposed was one that would be entirely to our advantage, to put it as if it would be his reward for services rendered to me? And, at all events, what claims have we upon him? What right have we to expect him to render us so great a service, at the risk of what is more precious to him than his fortune, without the promise of a reward? The Prince, as you say, was frank, where other men would have been hypocritical. All the more to his credit is it."

"Very good. I do not wish to discuss it with you. I may be both an imbecile and an egoist; but one thing is very certain: I will never marry Prince Léonticheff. A gentleman, indeed! It will be utterly vain for you to talk to me about it. You can't shake my resolution. You can only tire yourself and me. That is all."

VII.

THAT was late in June. In September we were formally affianced. In December we were married.

Meanwhile . . .

Armidis said to me, "I can't bear a man who crows, you know. It's so indelicate and vulgar—in a word, Léonticheffian. But really now, am I not quite remarkable as an amateur prophet?"

"Yes," I admitted, laughing. "If it gives you any satisfaction to think so, you are really quite remarkable as an amateur prophet."

"And you own now that my estimate of the Prince's character erred, if it erred at all, on the side of kindness? It's quite wonderful, my insight into human nature. I don't know whether I ought to congratulate myself upon it or not. It is often a source of pain to be too clear-sighted."

"Oh, no, I don't think the Prince is altogether the abandoned ruffian that you would make him out. I am not going to marry him, and I don't like him. I am sick of him, his voice, his face, his vast loose figure, his fatuous, unctuous manner, his boastfulness, his indelicacy and indiscretion—everything—they irk me and irritate me, and make me squirm; I am satiated with them. But that is no reason why I should be unjust to him. I think, with all his faults, he is well-meaning and honest according to his light. I think he is far more a fool than a knave. I don't believe he would ever do anything if he thought it wrong. I believe the whole trouble with him is a lack of humor. He has no perspective, no sense of congruity. That accounts for his grossest solecisms, his enormous self-conceit, his brutality and obstinacy, all his unpleasant traits. But I am sure that he is really, down deep, kind-hearted and well-meaning. A thoroughly bad man never could have written 'Drachensnest.'"

"Oh, dear! What a dangerous state of mind! Oh, if you go on believing that there is a single microscopical particle of good in him, they'll have you married to him yet. Oh, for my sake, won't you please think that he is just the most hopelessly immoral scoundrel that was ever created, and the most egregious cad, and the most fatuous idiot? You might think that, to oblige a friend."

"I should be glad to oblige you; but I don't see how I can force myself to think what isn't so."

"Then I tremble for you. Beware, beware!"

My father, at first, would not pay the least attention to my refusal, would not take it with any degree of seriousness.

"I do not scold you, I do not reason with you, nor plead with you," he said. "Why? Are you curious to learn why? Well, simply because I consider you already betrothed to the Prince. Remember, you are his promised bride."

The Prince himself pretended to assume the same attitude. "We are engaged to be married, you know," he would remind me from time to time.

I, for the most part, kept silence.

My father demanded, "How long do you intend to pout and sulk, like a silly child? How long before you are going to behave reasonably, like a full-grown woman? How long before you will accept the good fortune that heaven has sent you, and be thankful for it?"

I did not answer; but I wondered, "How long before they will realize the utter futility of their conduct?"

One day—the Prince having repeated for perhaps the fiftieth time, "We are engaged, you know"—I asked him, "If that is so, why do you loiter here in Paris? Why don't you keep your promise, perform your part of the agreement, go to Russia, and obtain a pardon for my father from your friend the Tsar?"

"Ah, but . . . !" he cried.

"Am I to consider that a sufficient answer?" I inquired.

"But, don't you see, it's this way. I fancy I would prefer to wait about doing that until our engagement is sealed and ratified by your own word of assent. It's only a formality, of course, like the Queen's signature to a law in England; yet I think I will wait till it is complied with. I'm a wonderfully patient man."

"Oh, then," said I, "I suspect that our engagement is not such an absolutely certain thing after all."

"On the contrary, quite certain, positively certain," he retorted. "Only I am like these Parisian cabbies, *je demande des arrhes!*"

Armidis told me one day that he had had "such a pathetic little confidence" from my father.

"Such a pathetic little confidence, poor dear man! He complains that you do nothing but pout and sulk. He can't get a word from you; nothing but just pouting, sulking silence. He wouldn't mind it so much, he says, except that he fears it may end by antagonizing the Prince. He's afraid his Serene Highness will get tired and go away . . . A word to the wise, my dear! Continue to pout and sulk and hold your pretty tongue."

Presently my father began to lose patience. He began to argue with me. He reminded me that it was the invariable custom among people of our class and nation for young girls to marry the husbands whom their parents, from the vantage ground of greater age, experience, and wisdom, picked out for them.

"We are not Americans," he said. "We are not Gypsies or Bohemians. We are Russians, and we are noble, of the superior nobility. Has any woman of your family, or of your class, ever dreamed of contracting a marriage except at the will of her parents? Or ever dreamed of rejecting the man of her parents' selection? Why should you, by what right do you, expect to be an exception to the rule? The trouble is that, owing to the irregular, happy-go-lucky mode of life that we have been compelled to lead during the last five or six years, you have got out of the tradition of your class. You have assimilated a lot of cheap, modern, revolutionary ideas. Armidis, with his preposterous unconventionality, is to blame. I curse the day when we first met him."

Then he dwelt upon the manifold and manifest virtues of the Prince; his wealth, his rank, his celebrity, his good nature. But finally and chiefly he appealed to my right feeling, my sense of duty, as his daughter, not to set myself up as the sole obstacle to the consummation of his hopes in Russia. And when I showed myself deaf and insensible even to this last appeal, he denounced me as a monster of selfishness and ingratitude.

"Look at this miserable closet, this hole in the wall, called a room, in which I, at my age, with my tastes and habits, am constrained to live and move and have my being! . . . I, who was born in the lap of luxury; who from my cradle until a few years ago was accustomed to every phase of ease and pleasantness that ingenuity could invent, and money purchase; I, an old man, a failing man! It is shortening my life, it is hurrying me to my grave! I have endured it as long as I can. Every day it becomes more and more humiliating, more and more insupportable, to me. This precarious, restricted, mean, ignoble manner of existence! A perpetual alternation between privation and hardship on the one hand, and ignominy and mortification on the other. And then to think that but for my daughter, but for my own flesh and blood, I might be relieved of all this to-morrow! I might to-morrow be reinstated in the enjoyment of my own fortune and my own position in my own country! To think that it is due to my own flesh and blood that I must pass my declining years in poverty and exile! It is too much. In very deed, it is sharper than a serpent's tooth to have a thankless child."

"I suppose I *am* a monster of selfishness," I began to think. "Here, at any rate, it is certain that I have it in my power to procure my father all that he most desires. Yet I refuse to do so. Why? For no better reason, after all, than that it suits me better. In other words, I refuse to sacrifice my own will and pleasure for his. That is what is generally called selfishness. It is true that if I would marry Prince Léonticheff, my father's dearest dreams could be fulfilled."

This thought began to prey upon me, to haunt me and torment me; that it was my fault, my fault alone, that my father had, as he said, to pass his declining years in poverty and exile. If I would, I could rescue him from them. I had but to speak one word, and honor and riches awaited him. Surely, I thought, it is selfish of me to refuse to speak that word. And yet I felt that I could not speak it; that it was a difficulty of power, more than one of will, that I could never bring myself to speak it; that my lips would refuse to shape it, my tongue to utter it.

"Remember, it is shortening my life. *You* are shortening my life," my father said.

"Oh, father, I can't do it, I can't do it," I groaned. "I would do it, if I could; yes, if I could, I believe I would; but I can't. It is beyond my power. Don't look at me and treat me and think of me as if I were wantonly injuring you. I would do anything, anything but that. But when I think of Prince Léonticheff in that way, my whole nature recoils; I loathe him and hate him, and I hate myself. It is not my fault. I can't do it, I can't. Oh, I wish you could understand."

"Oh, I understand, I quite understand; I assure you it is not difficult to understand. Go on. Continue. Sacrifice everything to your selfish weakness," returned my father, contemptuously; and for three weeks after that he would not speak to me.

Then one day Prince Léonticheff announced to us that he was going to leave Paris. My heart leapt as if a great weight had been removed from it.

"I have an old engagement to take some English friends of mine off for a cruise on my yacht. We're bound for Norway, and we shall be gone all of August. I'll let you hear from me now and then. Early in September you may expect to see me again. Good-by."

"There," said my father to me, after he had gone; "you have done it at last. You have done what I feared. You have tired him out. There was a limit to his forbearance. Now he has gone. Farewell my hopes. Picture to yourself what I have to thank you for. He will not come back. You may congratulate yourself upon a pretty stroke of business."

I said nothing, but in my heart I thought, "Alas, I am afraid he *will* come back."

That was the first word my father had spoken to me for three weeks. All through the month of August he scarcely spoke to me again.

Sometimes I would think, "After all, what is the use? If it is a question of my happiness, am I not already as unhappy as unhappy can be? The only thing I really care about, I can never have. Already life is nothing to me except a constant weary pain. Nothing that could happen could make the pain any greater. No, not even marriage with the Prince. It would only be to change the form of my misery; it would not add to it. And—it would lift my father into the seventh heaven of delight. As it is, I am of no use or value to any living human being, not even to myself. By consenting to marry the Prince, I should become of value to my father. Perhaps I had better do it."

But then a vision of the Prince would shape itself before my imagination; his burly form, his hulking carriage, his fat, florid face, his complacent, ingratiating smile, his coarse red hands, all the hateful details of his person and his manner; I would hear his monotonous, satisfied voice, husky and oily in the same breath; and I would shrink from the thought of him with an overmastering, physical disgust, like a child whom people are urging to drink some nauseous medicine.

But even yet I did not believe him to be a vicious man. On the contrary, I still believed him to be at the core kind and well-meaning, though infinitely crude and unlovely on the surface, and unutterably tedious.

Though my father would not speak to me, he talked very freely to Armidis; and Armidis sometimes repeated what he said to me.

"He describes himself as quite frantic," Armidis told me. "Here," he says, "is a marriage offering itself, far more advantageous than any he could have hoped for you, even if you had retained your position in Russia; of course ten thousand times more brilliant still, in view of your actual circumstances; and you, in sheer whim and caprice, you set yourself against it. It is to fly in the face of Providence. It would try the patience of a saint. It is a piece of gross, unreasoning selfishness, for which there is not even the shadow of an excuse. It is driving the poor man to despair. Oh, my ducats! Oh, my daughter! He thinks I am to blame. I have instilled ridiculous notions of independence into your little head. Now he wishes me to speak with you, labor with you, use my influence with you, seek to bring you to reason, and to repair the mischief I have wrought; all which; you see, like the amiable and obliging fellow that I am, I do to the best of my poor ability."

He said all this laughingly; but now, "Ah," he cried, suddenly becoming grave, "you are going through a few of the bitterest experiences a woman's life can hold. Forsaken—or apparently forsaken—by the man you love, and importuned to marry the man you don't love! It is very bad, very hard, my dear. But keep up your courage, keep up your strength, and tire them out."

"Yes," I said, "if they don't tire me out first."

It was beginning to wear upon me, my father's policy of silent disapprobation. Treated all day long every day as if I had done something shameful and disgraceful, never spoken to, and met constantly with cold reproachful glances—it was beginning to be more than I could bear. It somehow undermined my confidence in the righteousness of my own cause, making me feel as if I really had done something shameful and disgraceful, so that I carried with me a heavy sense of guilt, like an evil conscience.

"Oh, I wish I were your father's father," said Armidis.

"Why do you wish that?" I questioned.

"Oh, if I were his father, wouldn't he catch it, though! I'd give him something that he'd remember all the rest of his life. Haven't you noticed the prodigal way in which he has been adding to his wardrobe lately?"

No, I hadn't noticed it. Was it so?

"You're so self-absorbed you don't notice anything nowadays. Paul Mikhaelovitch has been blossoming out in half a dozen new suits of clothes. What I want to know is where he gets the funds?"

I went home, and I asked my father, "Have you been borrowing money from Prince Léonticheff?"

"By what authority do you presume to question me?" returned my father.

"I want to know. I want you to tell me. Have you taken money from him?"

"I must decline to answer any such impertinent questions from my daughter," he said.

But what was equivalent to an admission. My father has been borrowing money from the Prince! Did not this add a serious element of complication to the problems that I have to face?

"Will you tell me how much? Will you tell me how much you owe him?" I pleaded.

"I will not tell you anything. I will not talk with you. Until you come to me in a spirit of contrition, and beg my pardon for your selfish obstinacy, and offer me your obedience, you need not expect me to hold any intercourse with you."

Toward the end of August I received the following letter from the Prince. It bore the Copenhagen postmark. . . .

"Dear Mademoiselle Banakine:

"As you see by the date of this note, I am aboard the Tchernobog, off Copenhagen, on my way back to Paris from our cruise in these clear Scandinavian waters.

"You have no doubt observed that I am a very rough and awkward man with my tongue. Somehow it seems as though Nature had decreed that the pen should be my instinctive vehicle of expression. The moment I take my pen in hand, a change comes over my entire character. A load is lifted from my mind, my faculties are unchained, my vision becomes clearer, my thoughts become keener, my feelings purer and better. And I am like a dumb man suddenly blessed with the gift of speech. I discover to my surprise, to my joy, that I can express myself faithfully; that I need no longer stumble and stammer, and expose myself to misconstruction because of the imperfection and ambiguity of my utterance, but that I can say what I am moved to say in the way my heart longs to say it.

"Many times, many times, I have tried to tell you that I love you; I have tried by word of mouth to give vent to these deep and strenuous emotions of passion and of tenderness that have been stirring in my heart of hearts ever since the day I first saw you in Paris a few months ago. Will you let me try once more to tell it to you, to tell you that I love you and how I love you; this time with my pen on paper? Love you! Love you! Oh, I love you so dearly, so dearly and tenderly, so entirely! There is nothing in my power, there is nothing that I can imagine, which I would not do to procure you a moment of happiness, or to save you from a moment of pain. I love you so dearly that at this moment I would cut off my own hand, if by doing so I could bring one ray of joy into your life, or expel from it a single pang of sorrow.

"I want you to become my wife. Oh, how my heart leaps as I write the words! My wife! You, Monica, my wife! I want you to become my wife. I want it first because I am human and therefore selfish; and I have come to love you so utterly that my only hope of happiness in this world depends upon you; so utterly that if you send me away from you, I shall feel like one going out into eternal darkness upon a measureless desert of dry and arid sand; whereas if you will take me to you, if you will accept me, all my life will become one radiant glorious blessing to me. But I want it secondly, because there is an unselfish element in my love; because I know I can make you happy. I can make you happy and I can make your father happy. And the whole world will be happier and better for our great happiness. Oh, believe me, Monica! Believe me and trust me, and say that you will be my wife.

"I wish you to know this: that there is no concession I will not make in order to win you. Ask me anything, it shall be yours. Impose any condition, I will submit to it. No kinder husband ever existed than you will find me. I shall make it the sole aim and occupation of my life to shelter and protect you, to serve you, to provide for you, to cherish and keep you. And all I ask in return is the privilege to call you by my name, to look at you and think, She is my wife, my wife!

"Do you believe I love you? Do you believe in the seriousness and earnestness and kindness of my love? How then can you fear it or mistrust it? How can you fear it or mistrust it? How can you hesitate to give yourself to the keeping of a man who loves you like that?

"Ah, but my love is unrequited! I tell myself that a hundred times a day. She does not love me, she does not love me! I tell it to myself over and over; but it does no good. My own love is so great and ardent, I cannot be other than hopeful. For see: you do not love me, but neither do you hate me; and if you will only marry me, I will be so good to you, so devoted, so faithful and so tender, I will serve you so untiringly. I will in one syllable make you so happy, that in the end you cannot help but love me. Oh, give me a chance to prove it to you. If you could look into my heart, and see with your own eyes how true and pure, how absolute and all-controlling my love for you is, you could not hold out against me, you would not hesitate for an instant to confide your happiness to me, you could not fear or doubt such a love as that, you could not withstand it or refuse it.

"I am coming to Paris to press my suit in person. I shall arrive during the first week of September. Do you wish to know the question that is never absent from my mind? that repeats itself over and over in my thoughts all day, that keeps me awake at night, or if I sleep haunts my dreams? It is this: Will she have me? Is there any hope for me?

"Until the first week in September! Ah, the time seems long.

"You are to give my best respects to your father, and remember me kindly to Mr. Armidis. And whatever happens, whatever fate you reserve for me, believe me now and always your devoted

"LÉONTICHEFF."

A queer love-letter, surely; perfervid; even comical; but I could not smile at it. All day long, after reading it, I went about with a dull anguish in my heart, as if I had been threatened with some hideous calamity, and could not hope to escape it.

VIII.

One evening in the last week of August I came home from an errand across the river, and had rather a startling little experience.

It was intensely hot. I had walked all the way home, and had got very tired and very heated. I went up to my room. My room faced northward, so that it was protected from the sun; and the window had been open, and the blinds closed, all day; and it was deliciously fresh and cool.

I sat down to rest. I felt strangely tired, unduly tired, weak, languid, almost faint. I had a queer sensation of weight upon my chest, and of compression, as if it were bound in an excessively tight bandage. But I closed my eyes, and lay back in my chair; and the air from the window swept over me, bringing a grateful, reviving coolness.

All at once I began to cough. It was a cough unlike any that I had ever had before, deeper, more violent. It seemed as if my lungs were full of glue. I could not breathe. I could do nothing but cough, cough, cough, to save myself from suffocation or strangulation. I remember I thought, "Why, this is strange. I have not had a cold. What makes me cough like this?"

Suddenly my coughing ceased. I reached for my handkerchief. . . . . What I saw in another minute upon my handkerchief turned me to ice from head to foot. It was blood, a great scarlet patch of blood, vivid as flame upon the white linen.

My heart stopped beating, and a horrible thrill of terror ran through all my body. It was like suddenly hearing the voice of Death in my ears, and feeling the glacial touch of his hand.

I was utterly ignorant about such things. Only in a general way I knew that hemorrhage was considered a symptom of something alarmingly wrong in a person's health. In my ignorance I thought, "There! I am going to be ill, to have consumption, or something. . . . Oh, heavens, what shall we do now? What will become of us now? If I am going to fall ill, and be unable to work!"

What Prince Léonticheff had said came back to my memory with awful force: "Suppose your health should break down? Eh?" His face rose before me, lit by a triumphant smile, and seemed to question me: "Well, now? What are you going to do? Where will your daily bread come from now?"

The bleeding continued from time to time throughout the night. I think I hardly need to say that I suffered all the agonies that the imagination, stimulated by fear, and unrestrained by any sort of knowledge, can occasion one.

I did not wish to frighten my father, if it could be helped. So, in the morning, without telling him, I went to the consulting room of Dr. Druot, who, I knew, was esteemed one of the ablest specialists in diseases of the lungs in Paris.

He put me through a long and fatiguing examination. In the end he said, "I find a consolidation of the apex of the left lung. No, it is not a case for serious alarm, but it is a case for great care. If you are extremely careful, the consolidation may be resolved away. No, no, it is not consumption, not at all; but if it were neglected, it would develop into consumption. You must leave Paris at once. You must go to the country; Switzerland I would recommend, or the Tyrolean Alps. You must eat well, sleep well, guard yourself religiously against exposure to cold, and never allow yourself to get in the slightest degree fatigued. It is essential that your mind and body should enjoy perfect repose. Any sort of strain, bodily or mental, to which you might be subjected, would tell instantly upon this weak spot, this point of least resistance."

"Yes, I understand," I said. "But suppose I were too poor to do all this? Suppose I could not afford to leave Paris? That I must stay here to do my daily work, and earn my living? What would become of me then?"

"Ah, madam, the people who get well of troubles like this are those who are able to take proper care of themselves. The others, those who are in the predicament that you describe, they are the ones who die."

"Well, that is my predicament exactly," I said. "I have no money except what I can earn from day to day by teaching music. Now I beg of you to be perfectly candid, and tell me the worst."

"If you wish me to be candid, I will say that unless you take absolute rest, and great care of yourself, you will probably become an incurable consumptive within six months."

"And if I do take that rest and that care?"

"Oh, there is no reason why you should not become perfectly well and strong, and live to a green old age. You are not especially ill as yet; but according as you live a life of ease or of hardship, you will get very much better or very much worse within a short period. If you continue to work, you will have to go to the hospital before the spring."

So it reduced itself to this; I would no longer be able to earn a livelihood for my father and myself. In other words, destitution stared us in the face.

"The doctor forbids me to work. If I don't work, we starve. If I do work, I sicken, and perhaps die, and my father is left to starve alone," I said to myself.

The corollaries were obvious.

I went home and I said to my father, "*Soit !* I will marry Prince Léonticheff, if he will take me when he learns the condition of my health."

. . . .

"And now," concluded Armidis—he had come to me in a great state of indignation and excitement, to ask, "Is this true, that your father tells me?" and when I had answered, "Yes, it is quite true," he had talked with me, reasoned with me, pleaded with me, for an hour, trying, as he said, to save me from myself; but my mind was made up, and I had listened to him with incredulity and obstinacy, fool, fool, fool that I was—"And now," he concluded, "it will be your own doing, your own fault. You will have no one but yourself to blame for all the unutterable misery that you are going to bring upon yourself. I tell you that a loveless marriage is the worst sin, the worst sacrilege, that a human being can be guilty of. Nothing can justify it, nothing. It is a violation, a degradation, a profanation of everything that is fine or good or sweet, of everything that is sacred, in human nature. How you can bear the thought of it I cannot understand. I should think you would rather die a thousand times. Look: I will use plain words with you. You are no longer a child, and I can use plain words with you. Well, then, I say it is worse, it is immeasurably worse, than prostitution: for prostitution is but for the hour or for the day, whereas this frightful marriage is for life. Oh, my God! Monica, Monica! Oh, where is your soul? Where are your instincts, your intuitions?"

He walked rapidly up and down the room, wringing his hands, breathing heavily. I sat still in my chair, looking hard at the floor, determined to let nothing that he could say alter my resolution.

"Listen to me," he went on. "There never yet was a loveless marriage made that didn't end in wretchedness, not only for the woman, but for every one in any way concerned. It isn't only your own happiness, and Julian North's happiness, that you're dealing a death-blow to, it is just as surely your father's happiness, Léonticheff's happiness, the happiness of your unborn children. Your children who will come into this world conceived not in love, but in a man's lust, and a woman's loathing! And Léonticheff's happiness, I say. No, even if, instead of being the brute beast that he is, even if he were the purest and the most honorable gentleman in the world, not loving him, you would have no right to marry him; not loving him, if you married him, you would do him, him as well as yourself, a great wrong; you would engulf him and yourself, and your unborn children, and everybody else concerned, in hopeless misery. Not loving him, you have no right to marry him. How much less right have you to marry him, when you do love another man! Oh, I tremble for you, I tremble for you. But I have done my utmost to save you, and now it will be your own fault. . . . Oh, I know, I know what you are going to say," he cried, as I started to interrupt him. "I know, I know! Julian North does not love you any more! He has neglected you, he has abandoned you! I don't believe it; I have told you a hundred times that I don't believe it; but I will grant it for the sake of the argument; and then, what of it? What of it? Do two wrongs make a right? So long as one last particle of tenderness for him, of regret for him, lingers in your heart, you have no right even to dream of marrying another man. Oh, is there nothing that I can say, nothing that I can do, to move you, to bring you to reason, to wake you up, and rescue you from this utter ruin? Oh, it is like a nightmare. I see you in extreme peril, but unconscious of your peril, and I long with all my strength to warn you, to save you; but when I call out to you, you refuse to hear me, you are deaf and insensible. It is a question of ways and means? It is to avoid destitution? You cannot work any more, and if you don't work, starvation stares you in the face, you and your father? Don't I tell you that I will never let you want, you or your father? Don't I tell you that so long as I have a shilling in my pocket, half of it will be for you? Oh, you can't accept help from me! You would rather sell yourself body and soul to the devil, than accept help from me, from a friend who loves you like his own child, from one who has five times more money than he needs to spend, and would never feel the difference! You would rather sell your soul to the devil, and make your body over as a chattel to Léonticheff! Oh, you drive me mad, you drive me frantic. I see you in this great peril, and I see that you do not realize your peril, and I signal to you and call out to you, and you are deaf and blind, and I know that in a little while you will have wrecked your life, wrecked it forever. I believe—I do honestly believe—it would be better if I should kill you. Better if I should kill you here, now, on the spot!"

"I wish you would, I wish you would," I cried. "But if you don't kill me, if no one kills me, if I have to live, then. . . ."

"Then it will be your own fault, I say. If you marry Prince Léonticheff, it will be of your own free will, with your eyes open, and the consequences will be your own fault. I have shown you all the true morality of the matter as clearly as speech can do it. I have offered you every means of escape. Now, if you do it, you do it of your own free will, in perfect knowledge and understanding of what you are doing, and of what must inevitably follow. You are deliberately choosing to sow the wind, and you are perfectly aware that you must reap the whirlwind. Now I will say no more. I have done. I have tried to save you from destroying your happiness, but that is not all. I have tried to save you also from destroying your soul, from debasing and polluting your soul. Happiness doesn't matter so very much, perhaps; perhaps you could never have been entirely happy; but your soul. . . ! The soul that God has intrusted to your keeping! What right have you to ruin that? Oh, I tell you, the worst part of such pain as you are storing up for yourself is not that it is hot and biting and hard to bear: the worst part of it is that it demoralizes the soul, that it corrupts and diseases and disintegrates the soul. Yes, pain of that sort is infinitely, irresistibly demoralizing. Mark what I say, and learn in good time how true it is. Watch the gradual demoralization that will come upon you, creep upon you, grow upon you, from the day of your wedding to the end. Oh, I know the process: it is thus. I want to be happy; I have keen and strong in me the craving for happiness that is common and intrinsic to human nature, like the craving for food, for drink, for air. But I have done that which puts happiness forever beyond my reach. I have sold my birthright in happiness for a mess of pottage. I have made a bargain whereby I have renounced all claim to happiness, though I have obtained nothing in compensation. Very good, very good; now look. All this time the craving for happiness is there in my heart, gnawing like hunger, burning like thirst. It begins to be unendurable. This bargain that I have made I have got the worst of; this renunciation, I begin to think, is artificial, is unnatural, is unjust; this deprivation is unreasonable, uncompensated, impossible. I brood upon it, brood upon it; and by and by my brooding reaches the ear of the devil, like a voice summoning him, and he comes to me. He says to me, 'How is this? You crave happiness, but you have sold your claim to it. So! By fair means, then, it appears, you can't hope to obtain it. Well, then, why not try foul means? Why not try to steal a little of it back?' And the instant the Tempter first puts the question to me, that instant I begin to go to pieces, my moral disintegration sets in. His breath upon my conscience has produced a little spot of corruption, of gangrene; and now it begins to spread. I cannot obtain happiness by fair means; well, then, why be too scrupulous about the means? . . . You doubt what I say? It is a fancy, a phrase? Very good. Have it so if you like. Ten years hence, five years hence, I will ask you for your maturer opinion. Meantime, oh, God pity you!"

. . . .

The Prince went with us as far as Geneva. There he left us, for what he called a little run into Russia. At the end of six weeks he came back, bearing two important documents. One was a full and free pardon for my father, restoring him to all his rights as a Russian nobleman, including the possession of his sequestrated estates; the other was an Imperial authorization of our marriage.

We were married at Nice, in December. Then my father bade us good-by, and returned to St. Petersburg.

PART IV.

MATRIMONY.

I.

Early in May, 1890, we came on to London, to pass the season at Salchester House. A few days after our arrival, however, Prince Léonticheff went away again. He said to me, "I shall probably be gone a fortnight or three weeks." But he did not tell me where he was going.

We had been married more than four years. It is essential to the purposes of this confession that I should now set down as accurately and as dispassionately as possible the conception of Prince Léonticheff's character which I had come to entertain as a result of those four years of close acquaintance with him; also that I should summarize briefly the history of our married life; and finally that I should explain the actual state of our relations to each other.

My greatest difficulty will be to do justice to Prince Léonticheff.

I feel that unless this story that I am trying to tell, be, in all its aspects, in all its details, in all its inferences and implications, as true as human endeavor can make it, then it will destroy its own *raison d' être*, it will defeat itself; and all the time and labor that I have given it will have been expended in vain. And especially, if I err in my account of Prince Léonticheff, if the picture I present of him be false in color or distorted in form, I might as well, I might better, have held my peace.

I should find it easy enough to say in three words: I was miserably, incredibly unhappy; he treated me with the grossest brutality, the most refined cruelty; I hated him, I loathed him; he was bad, bad, bad. And all this would be true, in a way; but it would be only a fraction of the truth; it would be the truth seen from only one angle; and in its effect it would equal a falsehood.

For my own sake, if for no better reason, I must try to suppress my personal feelings, and to make my testimony concerning him impartial and discriminating.

To begin with, then, I must admit that he was not entirely bad, not by any means entirely bad. To this it might be answered that no human being ever was entirely bad, or entirely good; that absolute perfection or absolute depravity are no more attainable in flesh and blood, than a mathematically perfect line or circle is attainable with ink and paper; that in the heart of the most spotless saint or the most exalted hero there must lurk some remaining traces of human wickedness or weakness, while in that of the most vicious evil-doer some remote, perhaps microscopic, fibre must survive not wholly corrupt. . . . But when I say of Prince Léonticheff that he was not entirely bad, I do not mean it in that niggard philosophic sense. I mean that in an appreciable number of his actions and impulses he was positively good. Indeed, if I could leave his relations with me out of the question, I should be obliged to declare that, on the whole, as men go, he was not much worse than the average. So long as he was comfortable in mind and body, so long as he had his own way, and his appetites were satisfied, he really was a good-natured and well-meaning person. With money, for example, he was extremely free-handed, giving large sums annually to many charities, lending large sums to relieve the embarrassments of his friends, and always readily drawing his purse from his pocket when any case of distress among the poor was brought to his notice. If physical courage be a virtue, he had it in abundance. To give but a single instance, when malignant typhus was raging in Southeastern Russia, in the summer of 1886, he left London at the height of the season, and went straight to the district where the pestilence was doing its worst, and remained there for more than a month, visiting the hospitals, distributing alms, and writing descriptions of the horrors that he witnessed, for the English public to read in his newspaper, the *Beacon*. . . . He was coarse, if you please, and vulgar, and fatuous to the verge of insanity; he was clumsy and heavy and tactless; he was so completely wrapped up in himself that he never thought to avoid offending the sentiments of his neighbors; but his usual condition of mind was, none the less, one of lazy smiling contentment, the outward and visible sign of which was a broad and imperturbable good-nature.

Yes, if his relations with me could be eliminated from the problem, I believe I should have to say of him that, despite his conceit and his vulgarity, taken for all in all, and tried by the ordinary standards of the world, he was not much worse than the average of men.

A point upon which I must bear is this: that he thoroughly and profoundly believed himself to be, not merely no worse than the average man, but far, far better. He thoroughly believed himself to be a paragon of all manly virtue. He was no cynic, no hypocrite. He admired the nobility of his own character as fervently and as sincerely as he admired the power and acumen of his own intellect—with a sincerity and a fervor indeed that were almost religious. I am sure that under no possible circumstances would he ever have done anything that he thought brutal, or mean, or wrong. But then, he always thought, earnestly and honestly thought, that what he desired to do was right. That—or, in other words, his total lack of humor—was the key to his personality. Lacking humor, he lacked all sense of perspective, of congruity, of proportion, in looking at life. He regarded himself as the Centre of the Universe, the Fact of supreme significance in the world; his wish, his idea, his sensation of the moment was the one thing of real importance. If you opposed his wish, or disputed his idea, or caused him a disagreeable sensation, he believed in all conscience that you were a double-dyed villain, actuated by the basest motives, and attempting a most horrid crime; and that he was not simply justified, but that he was morally bound, to go to any length, to employ any means, for the purpose of vanquishing you, of confuting and confounding you, and defeating your nefarious designs.

I said long ago that the results of his lack of humor upon his conduct, often queer, were sometimes appalling. I believe that his lack of humor was accountable for the very worst meannesses, brutalities, and cruelties of which he was ever guilty, as well as for his most ridiculous solecisms. When, for instance, he would strike his wife, I am convinced that he believed himself to be performing an unpleasant but righteous duty, just as a father at times believes it to be his duty to administer corporal punishment to a refractory child.

At the time of our betrothal I had said very explicitly to the Prince—what, for the rest, it was scarcely necessary to say—"It must be understood that I do not love you, that I can never love you."

"Oh, that will be all right," said he. "You don't love me now, and I don't ask you to. But you will love me, you will come to love me. You can't help loving me, when once I've had a chance to woo you. I'm not at all disturbed about that."

"I assure you, you are deceiving yourself," I responded. "If you choose to marry a woman who does not love you, well and good. It is your own affair. But you mustn't delude yourself with the fancy that I shall come to love you. I never shall, I never can. It is best that you should make up your mind to that now, at the outset. Otherwise, you will prepare a disappointment for yourself."

But he had chosen not to heed this warning, not to give it any weight or place in his calculations. He believed that his powers of fascination were altogether irresistible, and that no woman could help succumbing to them, if they were once brought to bear upon her, any more than she could help drowning if she were immersed in water. Herein lay the beginning of much of our trouble. For awhile after our marriage, I must do him the justice of saying, no man could have been more patient or more forbearing with a woman's indifference than he was with mine. . . .

"Now that I have won your hand, you must let me win your heart," he said. "When you have seen how truly and devotedly I love you, how eager I am to make you happy, how untiring I will be in your service, how kind I shall be, how I shall have no other purpose in life than that of contributing in some way to your happiness and your well-being, I am sure your heart cannot hold out against me."

And for the first winter after our marriage, I must confess, there was nothing in his conduct, nothing even in his speech, of which I could fairly complain; on the contrary, nothing but what, remembering always that I was his wife, and he my husband, nothing but what deserved, even if it didn't obtain my gratitude and my praise. He was on his good behavior. In his speech he subdued and mitigated himself to such a degree that one who had not known him before would perhaps never have thought of him as an especially unrefined or underbred man. And in his conduct he was certainly all that I had any right to expect considering our relations—considering that I had sold myself to him, and was his wife. He was indeed untiring in his efforts to serve me, to make me happy; and if I remained miserably unhappy, if I was unhappier than I had ever been before, than I had ever conceived of being, it was not his fault: it was the fault of the situation, and the situation was the result of a bargain that I myself had made. He had the tact and the delicacy—incongruous as it may seem to speak of tact and delicacy in connection with Prince Léonticheff—he had the tact and the delicacy seldom to obtrude himself upon me. If he saw that his attentions were unwelcome to me, he would suspend them; that his talk was unwelcome, he would be silent; that his presence was unwelcome, he would go away and leave me alone. I say, "If he saw," for unless a thing of that sort were extremely plain, he could not see it; and I generally would try not to let him see.

"I never believed that he was a villain, but now I know that he is really, according to his light, a good man; far kinder and better than I ever gave him credit for," I began to say to myself; and if I still could not like him, if I felt no gratitude toward him, I began at least to respect him and admire him.

We spent that winter in his villa at Nice, my health making it impossible for us to go to Russia. We would never meet till the afternoon. His mornings he passed in his study, writing. After the mid-day breakfast he would usually come to see me in my apartments, often bringing his manuscripts with him to read them to me. Then he would ask, "And how would you like to spend the afternoon?" Whatsoever wish I expressed in answer to this question, he bowed to without a murmur. If I mastered my repugnance for his company enough to say, "I will go for a drive with you," or what else of the sort, it was almost touching to witness his suppressed delight. If I said, "I should like to be alone this afternoon," he would answer, "Very well," and submissively withdraw. He was surely as kind, as forbearing, as I, whom he had regularly bought and paid for, who bore his name, and ate his bread, and was his wife, had any right to expect.

"No," I said to myself, "it is not Prince Léonticheff whom I must blame, it is the situation, and the situation is one of my own making. If I had to sell myself at all, I could scarcely have sold myself to a better man than Prince Léonticheff." And my wonder was great that so clear-sighted a person as Armidis could have formed so mistaken an estimate of him.

But all the same, the situation was an extremely painful one, a most terrible and hateful one, and I was very far from happy in it. I would look at those other woman, of the half-world, who throng the Riviera at this season, and I would realize that after all the difference between them and me was not a moral difference, was only a conventional difference; and my heart would burn, and I could not lift up my eyes. Would I some time become accustomed to it, and not mind it any more, like them? I understood with a sort of sick horror that that sort of relief would be worse than the pain itself; that it would mean the final death and corruption of whatever remained pure and clean in my soul.

Oh, I was very far from happy. I had determined to put the thought of Julian North absolutely out of my mind, the love of him absolutely out of my heart. Perhaps I had succeeded in doing so; but it had been a little like tearing out a living fibre, and it left a wound that ached. It had been, too, like taking away from my life the only thing that made life worth living, the only thing that gave me an object to hope for, to work and wait for, to look forward to: now my life was all meaningless, purposeless, insipid to me; and as I realized how irrevocable it was, and how it must go on like this, without aim, without savor, for who could tell how many years—probably until I died, an old, old woman—I could not help it, but I fell to asking, "What is the use? Wherein is it worth while? Oh, have I got to plod this dismal circle round and round until I die?" Sometimes these questions would simply depress me, and fill me with a sort of dull, languid despair; but at other times they would infuriate me, madden me, with hurt and resentment. "Here is my one life," I would cry, "my one precious life, mine for once in the course of all time; and must I sit still, with hands tied, like Tantalus, and see it slip by, just beyond my reach, unemployed and unenjoyed? Of no use, interest, or profit to a single living human being, least of all myself! Is this what I was born for? Is it for this that life was given me? Life, precious, mysterious life! Must it be squandered in pettinesses, in fruitless and flavorless nothings, when it is not scorched and withered with pain and shame? Oh, I would rather die at once."

At first I had tried to find some solace, some oblivion, some excitement, in the doings of society, and in the chances of Monte Carlo. At first I had not altogether failed; but as soon as the novelty wore off, gambling began to pall, and society to wear, upon me. I was not very strong, and dressing and going, going and dressing, fatigued me; and besides, the Russian and English people who made up our world, were one and all either the fastest of the fast, or the slowest of the slow; in both cases equally unsatisfactory.

But as the spring drew near, Prince Léonticheff's patience began to show signs of giving way. He had tried all winter long to move my heart, and win my love. So long as he had been able to hope that by kindness he might prevail, he had been kind. If I could have loved him, I do not doubt, he would have continued kind. But I could not love him; and now, as he began to lose hope, as he began to think that perhaps I might never love him, his attitude toward me, and his treatment of me, began to alter.

At the outset, however, the alteration was not greatly for the worse. His attitude acquired a certain expression of injury, of righteous long-suffering, as if I had wantonly sinned against him, and he was sorry, rather than angry. His treatment of me became a little *empressé*, and seemed to imply a reproach, as if I were a perverse child, and my perversity grieved him. The germ of all our trouble lay in this: Prince Léonticheff was utterly unable to understand that I *could* not love him; that it was with me not a question of willingness, but a question of power; that I had no more power to change the nature of my feelings toward him, than I had to change the color of my eyes. He was utterly unable to understand that. As undoubtingly as he believed that he lived and breathed, so undoubtingly also did he believe that no woman upon whom he chose to exert his charms could help loving him, if she would only let herself go; and his inference was that I, perversely, deliberately, of malice aforethought, was holding myself back, was checking the natural tendency of my emotions, and laboriously compelling myself to remain indifferent to him. Believing this, he not unnaturally felt aggrieved, felt that I was cheating him of what he had earned, that I was withholding from him his due, that I was of set purpose refusing him justice; and he commenced to regard himself as a wronged man, a sort of martyr, and me as a cold-hearted, wicked woman.

His attitude toward me, and his treatment of me, as I say, implied a grievance and a reproach; but it was a long while before he spoke. We left Nice in May, 1886, to come to London. It was in the train, in the seclusion of a Pullman compartment, as we were nearing Calais, that he first broached the subject of his wrongs.

"Look here, Monica," he said, "I want to have a little talk with you. I want to have a little serious talk with you, if you don't mind. I think you will be fair enough to acknowledge that I haven't troubled you much this winter with talk about ourselves, and now perhaps you can endure a little. There are things that ought to be said."

"Yes?" I answered, in a flutter of nervous apprehension.

"Well, to begin with, I know it would be utterly useless for me to ask you whether you care anything for me. I know you don't. You don't care a halfpenny for me, you don't care a farthing. I'm as fond of you, as careful of you, as kind to you, as a man can be to a woman, and yet you don't care any more for me, you haven't any more ordinary affection for me, not to speak of love, than you have for the engine-driver of this train."

He paused for a little; but I kept my eyes turned from him, and did not speak; and by and by he resumed. . . .

"All this winter long I have done everything in my power, everything I could think of, to make you happy, to make you comfortable and contented, and to move your heart a little toward me. Whatever wish you have expressed, or I have been able to divine, has been law to me. I've never asked a single service of any kind from you; and when you have chosen to do me one unasked, I have accepted it with thankfulness, as if, instead of being my due, it were a gratuitous favor on your part. I have always preferred your pleasure not only to my pleasure, but to my interests. I know, for instance, that some of my best friends, some of my most valuable and useful friends, have been offended this winter by our neglect of them. But I saw that you didn't care for them, that it would be a bore for you to have to visit them much, or entertain them; and so I said nothing, I made no protest or complaint, I let you go your own way, and ignore them. I only mention that as an example of what I mean when I say that I've made no demands upon you, that in small things as well as great I've respected your pleasure as if it were the only thing of importance in the world."

"Yes," I said. "You have been very good, very patient and forbearing. But I did not mean to offend your friends. If I had known that you cared about it, I should have been perfectly willing to receive them and visit them as often as you liked. I simply waited for you to express your desire."

"Quite so, quite so. Don't understand me as complaining of your conduct. I'm not complaining of it, I'm only reminding you of it. You waited for me to express my desire; but I *didn't* express my desire, I *suppressed* it, because I wanted to spare you even the faintest sort of fatigue or annoyance. The thing I do complain of is this: First, that you appear deliberately to have shut your heart against me, to have hardened yourself against me, so that you haven't given me—all I ask for—a fair chance to win you, or yourself a fair chance to be won. You seem to have made up your mind beforehand that you will deliberately prevent any particle of liking or fondness for me, not to speak of passionate love, taking root in your heart. All I've done, and all I've refrained from doing, don't appear to have made any impression of any kind upon you. You have simply set to work with might and main to freeze yourself toward me. I must say I think I'm justified in complaining of that."

"If it were true, yes, you would be justified in complaining. But it is not true. I told you before we were married that I did not love you, that I never could love you. You ought not to have married me, if you could not be satisfied with that. I appreciate deeply all your kindness to me this winter, all your forbearance. But I can't love you. It is no more possible for me to force a feeling in my heart, than to force myself to grow an inch in stature."

The blood rushed to his face, and he cried out, "That's what makes me furious. I say that is downright childish folly. Nobody asks you to force a feeling in your heart. On the contrary, all I ask is that you will let your heart alone, let it follow its natural impulses. It isn't in nature for a woman to remain indifferent to a man who loves her as I love you, who is as kind to her, as untiring in his devotion to her, as I am to you. The trouble is that you're forcing your heart in the other direction. Let your heart alone, give your heart a chance. That's all I ask. Why, you couldn't help loving me, if you only wouldn't try not to. It makes me furious. Isn't it your duty to love your husband? Isn't it his right to demand your love? You say you can't force yourself to love him. Well, I tell you that if the man is the sort of man I am, kind and devoted, and—I use your own words—forbearing and patient, if he lays his life and his heart at your feet as I do, I tell you you can't help loving him, unless you make a deliberate effort not to. And that's what you're doing, and that's one of the things that I complain of."

He was very much excited. He spoke in a very loud voice, and very vehemently. What could I answer? I looked out of the window, and held my tongue.

"Well? well? Have you nothing to say?" he demanded.

"I can't say any more than I have said. I am not forcing my heart in any way. I can't love you. I may esteem you and respect you, but I can't love you. I told you I couldn't at the outset. I told you you were storing up a disappointment for yourself. Why did you marry me?"

Again the blood rushed to his face, staining it almost purple. He bit his lips, his eyes flashed, and he cried out, "By God! Don't you ask me that again, or I'll do something we'll both be sorry for. I talk to you as if you were a sensible woman, and reason with you till I'm black in the face, and then I ask you what you have to answer, and you simply go back, like a little deaf, dumb, imbecile infant, and repeat what you said in the beginning, letter for letter, for all the world as if you hadn't heard a word that I had spoken. You—you ought to be taken out and whipped."

"Why don't you take me out and whip me?" I asked. I also was somewhat angry now.

"You'd better not tempt me to. Perhaps I will," he retorted, nodding his head threateningly, and looking wickedly at me from his deep-set little eyes.

After which we were both silent for a while.

By and by he began again, very quietly. . . .

"Of course I ought not to have said that, and I offer you my apologies. I'm sincerely sorry for it; but you infuriated me, and I didn't realize what I was doing. I'll say no more now about your loving me. I'll simply wait, and try, and hope. If you'll only give yourself and me a chance, I am sure you must come to love me in the end. But now there's something else I want to talk to you about; and that's the way you mope. Here you have everything in this world that a reasonable human being can ask for of the gods. You've got wealth, and all that wealth can buy; you've got a magnificent title, and a high place in the best society of Europe; you're not very strong, perhaps, but you've got no real disease, and on the whole you're blessed with health as good as that of most people; your time is all your own, to do with as you please; you've got a husband who loves you like a dog, and whose only purpose in life is to make you happy; if any woman ever had reason to be contented with her lot, to thank heaven for her lot, you have. And yet, see. Day after day you go about with a rueful countenance, and a whining voice, and pathetic eyes, to all appearances miserably and morbidly wretched. Now, I complain that that is unreasonable, and ungrateful, and unworthy of you. You have no right to nurse misery, and refuse comfort. It's your duty to enjoy and be thankful for the good things that heaven has vouchsafed you. And I say that if you go on like this, you'll deserve to have some real misfortune happen to you, just to punish you for your ingratitude."

I did not answer.

"Well, will you do me the honor of answering me?" he demanded.

"I have nothing to answer. I was not aware that I had troubled you with any expression of my griefs, if I have griefs?"

"No, you haven't; and that's just the point. You go about with a dismal countenance, but you never speak. Now, I say that if you have no griefs, then you'd better try to be and to look a little more cheerful. And if you have griefs, then I think it's my right to know what they are. I say you have no occasion for any griefs; but apparently you're eaten up by them, all the same; and now I demand to hear what they are. Good heavens, how many women in this world would like to change places with you!"

"If I have griefs, they are not ones that I can talk about. I did not know that my countenance had been dismal. I'll try to alter it."

"It isn't your countenance that I complain of, except as your countenance reflects your heart. I say you have every possible reason to be light-hearted and happy. And if you're not that, if there is any deep and mysterious sorrow gnawing at your vitals"—this in a tone of irony—"I have a right to know what it is."

"I do not think there is any deep or mysterious sorrow gnawing at my vitals. But if I am not exuberantly happy, I can't help it. One can't be happy or unhappy at will, any more than one can be hungry or thirsty. At least I can't."

"Well, you wait. Perhaps some day you'll really have something to cry about. Then you will look back at this time, and wish with all your might that you'd realized how well off you were. Yes, by Jove, you're exactly like a child. You don't appear to have any more mind or reasoning faculty than a six-year-old infant. I might as well argue with an infant. Yes, by God! I was right. A whipping would do you good. It would be the only way of appealing to you, just as it's the only way of appealing to a child. It would set your blood circulating, and it would take your mind off your imaginary, manufactured sorrows, to make acquaintance with a little genuine pain."

"Thank you," I returned.

"Well, now, then, I ask you once for all, will you tell me what it is? If you've got any grief of any kind in your bosom, I demand to be told what it is."

"I have nothing to tell you."

"God damn you!" he screamed, his rage suddenly getting the mastery of him. "I believe you are still thinking of that starved cur of an American painter. If you are, by God, I advise you to put the thought out of your head, or there'll be trouble."

I sprang to my feet, and made for the door of the little Pullman compartment in which we were travelling. But he placed himself before me.

"No, you may just sit down again where you were," he said. "If I want to talk to you, I think you may do me the honor to listen to me. There's no use your standing there. You don't leave this compartment till I'm ready to let you."

"Oh, very well. If you resort to force. Of course you are stronger than I am," I answered and resumed my seat.

"Well, now, if you're ready we may talk," said he. "And I want you to understand to begin with that I meant no offence to you by what I said about your young American painter. I spoke hotly, because you angered me; but you have no ground for taking offence. I will say this much for you at once: I know you are the soul of honor, and that you would never do anything to injure me. So far as that's concerned, I'd be perfectly willing to leave you alone with him on a desert island; I know you'd never be guilty of doing anything wrong; you've got too much honor, and too much pride and self-respect. But what I want to impress upon you is this: that you can injure me just as much by feeling and thinking, as you can by doing. I'm your husband, and your husband is entitled to demand of you not only that you should keep yourself faithful to him with your body, but also that you should be faithful to him in thought and feeling. Now, I submit it to you in all fairness, if it's your American painter who's standing between you and me, who's preventing you from giving me your love, isn't it due to me that you should put the thought of him entirely out of your mind? There, I have spoken to you reasonably and kindly; I expect a reasonable answer."

"I will not answer you. I will not have anything to say to you. You have insulted me and outraged me in the most cowardly manner; and you have compelled me by force, against my will, to sit here and listen to you.

But you cannot compel me to answer you. I have nothing to say to you except this: that, after the way in which you have spoken to me and treated me to-day, I despise you."

"You hell-cat!" he cried, and struck me across the face.

II.

I WISH most earnestly in making this confession to extenuate nothing, and to set down nothing in malice. I have not recounted the foregoing scene for the purpose of casting discredit upon Prince Léonticheff, or of exculpating myself. Indeed, I realize perfectly well that I was by no means entirely blameless, that perhaps I was as much to blame as he was. I can see that my attitude, my conduct, and my speech must have been extremely exasperating to him; that I ought, in all right and justice, to have met him in a kindlier, friendlier, more sympathetic spirit. I can imagine that if I had done so, he on his side would have behaved differently, and things from that time forth might have gone better with us, instead of worse. No, I do not wish to excuse myself, or to prejudice him. Whether he was to blame, or I was to blame, or we were equally to blame, what happened happened; and to tell what happened, honestly and plainly, not to assign the blame for it, is the task I have set myself. He insulted me, and struck me, and that was all wrong; but I had infuriated him, and that was all wrong too; so perhaps it was six of one and half a dozen of the other.

But, though I think that to-day, at this distance, I can take a fair and reasonable view of it, at the time I could do nothing of the kind.

If I had been able then, as I am now, to make allowances for him, and to appreciate my own share of the responsibility, doubtless we might have forgiven each other, our quarrel might have served to clear the air between us, and we might have begun our life anew, upon a better footing, a more thorough understanding. But, as I say, I could do nothing of the kind. The blow he struck me seemed to set my brain on fire; I was consumed by a wild, unutterable pain and rage and hatred; I could think of nothing else, I could feel nothing else. I clinched my fists, and looked at him, and if wishes could have killed, he would have died on the spot. It was well perhaps that there were no more deadly weapons within my reach.

I did not speak to him again till after our arrival in London, at Salchester House. At first, for a long while, he himself did not speak. His bearing after his explosion was that of a wronged superior being, who had been compelled, to his regret, to resort to extreme measures. It seemed to say, "There! You see! I have had to be severe with you. I am sorry it came to that, but it was your own fault. You drove me to it, you deserved it, you made it necessary, you brought it upon yourself. I regret not what I did, but the necessity I was under to do it. Very like the bearing of a virtuous parent, who has been forced to inflict bodily punishment upon his erring child. This self-righteous attitude on his part was like fuel to the fires of my resentment. Oh, how I hated him! How fiercely my heart burned! How intensely I longed in some way to revenge myself upon him! How it baffled and maddened me to realize that I was absolutely powerless to do so!

But gradually these first violent feelings subsided, giving way to a dull aching misery; a sense of utter desolation and friendlessness. Here I was, all, all alone with him, with this man whom I feared and hated, between whom and myself there was no possible ground of understanding or sympathy, yet whose wife I was, so that he had to me all the right, and over me all the power, that law and tradition give a husband! It seemed to me very awful. It filled me with a vague but keen alarm and dread. Oh, if I could but see a friendly face, hear a friendly voice; anything to break this terrible sense of being alone with him! I thought of my father, thousands of miles away in Russia. I thought of Armidis, the only other friend I had in the world, virtually just as far away, in Paris. And yes—I thought of Julian North; but that thought was as guiltless and as despairing as the thought of one who is dead. And then I returned to the actual present place and time, and saw myself alone in that railway carriage with Prince Léonticheff; and my feeling of friendlessness was bitter beyond expression.

When we left the train at Calais, and my maid joined me, I could have thrown myself into her arms, and kissed her, and wept upon her shoulder; she was the only human being in my horizon with whom I could exchange a friendly word.

The Prince left her and me together in the cabin he had engaged, during the crossing, and for that hour and a half I was almost happy, such relief it gave me to escape his presence.

He broke silence for the first time after we had taken our places in the train from Dover.

"Come! don't you think you have sulked long enough?" he asked.

At the sound of his voice, all my violent feelings of rage and hatred were instantly revived. I bit my lips, and did not speak. I could not have spoken. It was a choice between keeping silence, and screaming out.

"Now, really, Monica," he went on, in his softest and most plausible accents, "you are behaving like an unreasonable child. A woman, a mature human being, if she has anything on her mind, talks it out; it's the part of a silly, stubborn little child just to sit in a corner, and pout and sulk and refuse to speak. Come! let us understand each other. I struck you. I suppose that's what you're sulking about, so I'll admit at once that I struck you. Well, I'm sorry I struck you. I'm sorry I had to strike you. I don't believe I struck you hard enough to hurt you; there's no mark. But I'm sorry all the same. The trouble was that you drove me to it. It was the only way of moving you, of stirring you up. I'd tried in vain to talk to you, to argue with you; you were deaf. I'd exhausted every means of appealing to your intelligence, and then I struck you. Well, when a woman deliberately behaves like a child, she's got to expect to be treated like one. You did behave like a child; you're behaving like one now; and I struck you because that's the only way of getting any satisfaction out of a child. However, as I say, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I gave way to my impulse. I suppose I ought to have borne with you longer. But you have no idea how trying you were. If you could see yourself even at this moment! By Jove, I believe very few men would be as patient with you as I am."

Still I did not speak. I had nothing to say, except that I hated him and despised him; and it seemed to me that it would be a condescension on my part to tell him that.

I thought, "He may talk and talk and talk; but I will not lower myself so far as to utter one syllable in reply."

He waited a little; then, "Will you pay me the compliment of answering me?" he demanded.

Again he waited a moment. At last he gave a short, angry laugh. "By God, I believe you want to make me do it again," he cried. "Well, if you enjoy making a sickening idiot of yourself, you may. I won't trouble myself to notice you."

But at the end of perhaps a half-hour's dignified silence, he began anew. . . .

"Oh, this is too absurd. What is it that you are thinking about, what are you meditating, as you sit there with your back up, and your lips stuck out, as silent as if you were dumb?"

He gave me time to reply; but then, as I did not reply, "Well, have you got a tongue in your head? I am waiting to hear what you have to say?"

But I said nothing.

"Come! You've got to open your mouth if I have to pry it open with a chisel. Do you hear me? I want to know what it is you've got on your mind. Whatever it is, out with it. If you want to abuse me, abuse me. Say your say. Only don't put on these airs of a tragedy-queen. You'll make me laugh. If you want to curse me, curse me *vivâ-voce.* If you go on swallowing your venom, it may strike in. You'd better spit it out. There! I've pleaded with you long enough. I won't plead with you any more. I fall back now upon my rights. I will thank you to remember that I'm your husband; and now I demand as my right to be told what it is you're turning over in your obstinate little brain."

And so from time to time he would renew his efforts to make me speak, now imploring, now threatening, now arguing, now commanding—while I, it cannot be denied, derived a certain malicious satisfaction from the spectacle of his impotent annoyance—until we reached Salchester House, and I had been shown to my own apartments, and supposed myself rid of him for the night.

But I had not been alone five minutes, when he joined me; opening the door of my dressing-room, which I had forgotten to lock, without the formality of rapping.

He sent my maid away, and then he said to me, "I am not going to bed to-night, I am not going to let you go, until we have had this out. Now the sooner you open your lips and speak, the sooner you'll be left to your own devices."

He sat down, and settled himself in his chair with the effect of a fixture.

"Here I sit," he said, "until I hear your voice. And I can't allow you to leave the room before me."

I looked at him, and I realized with a certain mixture of despair and weariness that he would probably be as good as his word.

"Well? You wish me to speak. What do you wish me to say?" I demanded.

"Why, look here, Monica"—dropping his tone of authority, and becoming persuasive—"I wish without rancor or ill-feeling to talk this thing over with you. Things have come to a sort of crisis between us, and it's best on all accounts that we should talk our thoughts out, and understand each other. I struck you to-day in the train. I've already told you that I'm sorry I did so. I don't think I struck you hard enough to hurt you, and I do think that you deserved it; but all the same I'll admit at once that it would have been better if I hadn't struck you at all, no matter how lightly, no matter if you did deserve it. There, I've made an apology. Now I want to know whether you can be generous enough to accept it? You've been pouting your lips and brooding over it ever since it happened. Now I want to know if you can't drop it, and behave as if it hadn't occurred? I've apologized; it's for you to forgive."

"If you wish me to behave as if it hadn't occurred, why will you persist in talking to me about it?" I asked.

"I talk to you about it because I want to hear you talk. I want to know what you have to say. You've been turning it over and over and over perpetually in your brain for the past five hours. You must have made up your mind to something, by this time. I want to know what. I want you to open your lips. I don't care what you say, only say it. Spit it out, instead of swallowing it. It's this infernal silence that I can't stand. It frightens me. I don't know what you mayn't be meditating. I don't dare to leave you alone."

"I have nothing to say to you, nothing whatever. I don't think it would give you any pleasure to hear what I think of you; I don't wish to expose myself to your violence again. At any rate, I will not stoop to recrimination with you. You know what has happened as well as I do. You understand the situation as well as I do. There is nothing to be said. It goes without saying."

"Now listen to me for one moment, Monica. I have made up my mind to control myself, and to be very kind and patient with you. Therefore I shan't allow your stubbornness or your unfairness to anger me. I will just put it to you as from one reasonable being to another, whether we hadn't better talk this thing out, and understand each other. You say you don't wish to expose yourself to my violence again. That's a petty and contemptible thing to say, and you ought to be ashamed of it. I've apologized for my violence, and it isn't very noble of you to taunt me with it. What's more, if you don't want me to be violent with you, don't bring it upon yourself by acting like a silly child, and making me forget that you're a woman. You say I wouldn't enjoy hearing your opinion of me. I say, yes, I would. No matter how uncomplimentary or unjust it may be, I'd infinitely rather hear you speak it out in plain words, than have you hold it in, and let it rankle and fester and poison our relations. Now, come. You see I'm calm and reasonable; try to be reasonable yourself. I don't understand how you can be so small. Any one would suppose you had no more soul than a little tuppenny-ha'penny shopkeeper's wife. I should think with your traditions you could be bigger, more generous. There, now; in all kindness, I beg you to talk it out. We never can take up our life again until we have talked this thing out, and come to an understanding."

"There is nothing to talk out. There is nothing to understand. It is very easy for you to sit there and prate of patience and kindness and generosity. Is it kind or generous of you to force your presence upon me, here in my private rooms? I should think *you* might be patient, you who have all the advantages on your side. I have nothing to say to you, except to ask you to leave me. I do not think you would stay, if you could know how unwelcome you are."

He colored up. "I see," he cried. "You want to exasperate me still more, so that I shall say or do something else to give you an excuse for posing as an innocent, abused woman. *Your* private rooms, indeed! I think this house is mine, and that I can occupy any part of it I please, whenever I please, without asking you. *Your* private rooms! Why, damn it, you haven't a stitch of clothing on your back that doesn't belong to me. Yes, I see. You want to drive me to the point of making a brute of myself. But you can't do it. I've got myself in hand."

"Oh, no," I retorted, "I don't think you could *make* a brute of yourself."

"I thought you weren't going to stoop to recrimination?" he flung back.

For awhile after that we were both silent.

At last, "Look here, Monica, is there no way by which you can be brought to your senses?" he asked. "It stands to reason that you've made your mind up to something. Anyhow, I can see that you have, by the set look in your face. Now, I want to know what. The least you can do is to tell me what. I think I am well within my rights when I ask to be informed what you mean to do."

"I have not the faintest objection to telling you what I mean to do. Of course you must know that after what has happened to-day, I cannot mean to live in the same house with you any longer than I can help. I shall stay here to-night, and to-morrow I shall start with my maid for St. Petersburg, to join my father."

"By Jove, that shows what a thought-reader I am! Do you know, I suspected exactly that. I had a sort of presentiment that that was what you were meditating. But do you take me for a full-blown lunatic? Do you fancy for one instant that I will allow it? Do you suppose I am going to stand still, and let my wife abandon me, and make a scandal in the four corners of Europe? What do you suppose I married you for, if you are not to live with me? Oh, you must think I am a fool!"

"I don't know what you married me for, I'm sure. Certainly, if you expected me to live with a man who was capable of beating me, you deceived yourself. I do not intend to expose myself to the risk of a repetition of to-day's experience. I shall leave you, and go to my father. As for your allowing or not allowing it, I don't see how you can prevent it."

"Oh, you don't! Well, then you'd better invest in a pair of spectacles. I do. I see very clearly. I see several ways by which I can prevent it. I could lock you up here in your room, if it came to that. You mustn't allow yourself to forget that you happen to be my wife, and that the law gives me considerable authority over you. But I think I know another way that will be more effective still. Beating you, indeed! You would go away from me, and tell people that I had beaten you, and spread the scandal of it far and wide. Poor defenceless thing, her husband maltreated her, and she had to fly from him, and seek refuge with her father! It takes a woman to pervert the truth like that, to lie like that. I struck you a little gentle blow on the cheek, so light a blow that it hasn't even left a mark; and now you talk of my having beaten you! You wouldn't hesitate to tell the world that I had beaten you! Yes, it takes a woman, a small-souled, mean-spirited woman. A man would be ashamed. No, no; I can't allow it. I couldn't allow you to leave me under any circumstances; but I must especially forbid it under the actual ones. You must put your thoughts of flight out of your mind."

"You asked me what I intended to do, and I have answered you. I have no desire to discuss it with you. Unless you do lock me up in my room—and I hardly think that you will take such an abject advantage of your superior strength as that—I shall not stay under your roof another day. I may be a mean-spirited woman, but I am not so mean-spirited as to go on living in the same house with a man who has insulted me as you have done to-day. I do not see why you should wish me to do so. You must know that there is no danger of my making public the indignity to which you have put me. If you are not ashamed of it, I am. All I ask is to be allowed to leave you, and go to my father. But, as I said, whether you allow it or not, I shall do it. That is all."

"Oh, that's all, is it? You think that's all. Very good. Now listen to me. I'll speak very plainly to you for about half a minute, and then I'll give you complete liberty to do as you choose. I've just got one thing to say, and that is this. You pack up your traps, and call for your maid, and leave for St. Petersburg, if you like; I won't stop you; only there's one fact you'd better bear in mind—before you reach the Russian frontier, your worthy father will be marching with a shaved head in the direction of Siberia. Don't allow yourself to forget that. As I imagine you have seen, I possess a rather considerable influence with the powers that be in my native land, and I hold, so to speak, the fate of your venerable parent at the points of my ten fingers. A word from me by telegraph would cause his arrest and transportation before he knew where he was standing. . . . Don't allow yourself under any circumstances to forget what I'm telling you. You see, if you were amenable to reason in the ordinary way, I shouldn't find it necessary to go into these little details; but in the actual situation it strikes me as perhaps the only argument that will be likely to convince you. Just remember, whenever you feel in a rebellious mood, that I practically possess over your father the power of life and death."

"What do you mean?" I cried in terror. "What has my father done? What can you accuse him of? Oh, I don't believe a word you say. It is simply a threat."

"Well, I'll tell you how you can test it, and find out to your perfect satisfaction whether it's simply a threat or not. Do what you said. Leave for St. Petersburg to-morrow morning. And then, when you arrive there, inquire for your father's whereabouts. I fancy you'll find that he's departed for our pretty little Asiatic colony of political damned fools."

"Will you tell me what my father has done? What has he done, to place himself in such peril? What can you allege against him, to cause him to be arrested? What can you prove?"

"No, I won't tell you. It would tire me. All I'll say is this, that your father is not an incarnation of discretion, and that a very little indiscretion goes a long way in Russia. Then, you see, besides, I'm something of a power in Russia, and I had more or less to go bail for his good behavior when I procured his pardon, and an accusation of any sort from me wouldn't need to be bolstered up with any very great amount of proof."

"Very good. I shall warn my father. I shall tell him to leave Russia at once."

"As you please, of course; but I wouldn't, if I were you. You'd only succeed in making things unpleasant for him. I'm going to send a little telegram to St. Petersburg to-night instructing certain people, upon whose obedience I can rely, to keep an eye upon your father's movements, and at the first sign of a disposition on his part to leave the country, to clap him into jail."

"Oh, I don't believe that you will do anything so base. What is the use, after all? Why should you object to letting me leave you? Why shouldn't you allow me to go to my father, for a visit? Why should you fear any scandal? What could be more natural than that I should go for a visit to my father? Nobody shall ever learn from me what has happened to-day. I promise you that. Why should you wish me to go on living in your house? We're utterly unsuited to each other. You can't be much happier in it than I am. It has all been a mistake—our marriage—everything—a terrible mistake. Why can't you let me go away?"

"Why, because I love you so, my dear. Because your presence is a constant joy to me. Because, so long as I can see you every day, and woo you, I can hope to win you; whereas, if you were away from me, you might forget me; I might lose what little ground I have gained."

He looked at me with eyes that made my blood run cold; and the inflexion of his voice sent a shudder through me.

"Come!" he said, stretching out his arms. "We'll say no more about it. Let's kiss and make up."

I shrank away from him, and tried to suppress a tremor in my voice as I answered, "Yes, I quite agree with you.

We'll say no more about it. We have said as much as is at all necessary. Will you be good enough to leave me now? I'm very tired."

He took a quick step forward, and caught me in his arms. Then he began to kiss me, on the cheeks and on the forehead. I put up my hands, and covered my lips.

"Oh, how cold you are!" he complained. "What are you made of? Not flesh and blood, I'll be bound! . . . Oh, yes, I'll leave you now. Only, remember what I have told you. I meant it, every word of it. Your father's liberty depends upon a nod from me, and it is altogether at your option whether I shall give that nod or not. Good-night."

That explains why I could not separate from the Prince, why I had to go on living with him, insupportable as our life together had become.

III.

After that things went steadily from bad to worse between us, and from worse to worst. It is a miserable story, sordid and disgraceful in all its aspects; it makes my cheeks tingle with shame to think of telling it; and I shall tell no more of it than I must. Sometimes, when I reflect upon it, it seems as if it had been all my fault, or chiefly my fault, at least; but at other times I feel that it was inevitable from the beginning—that nothing else could possibly have resulted from such a wretchedly unnatural and ill-assorted marriage.

At first, for a while, it was evident that Prince Léonticheff desired and hoped for a reconciliation. He made no absolute overtures for one, but his speech, his bearing, everything, showed that he desired one. I, however, not only would not, I could not meet him half way. A deep sense of resentment toward him, a violent dread and loathing of him, had got kindled in my heart. Quite without reference to my will, they burned hotter and fiercer as time went on, instead of cooling and dying out.

The trouble was that every day fresh fuel was added to them, because I had to live with him. If he had allowed me to leave him, and go to my father, I dare say it would have been different. But by the employment of means that seemed to me cruel and cowardly to the last degree, he had compelled me to remain with him. He held my father as a hostage! That constraint, that annihilation of my personal liberty, and the method of it, stung me with a furious sense of outrage and injustice.

And then, joined to that, my constant feeling of his nearness to me, my consciousness that I was living in his house and on his bounty, the necessity I was under frequently to meet him, speak with him, listen to him, were like continual reopenings of the wound, which kept it sore.

Was it my fault? or was it inevitable?

Perhaps it was both. It was the fault of my temperament, of my character, no doubt; but then, my temperament and my character were entailed upon me, and I could no more help them than I could help the color of my hair.

At all events, as I have said, things went steadily from bad to worse with us. Steadily my hatred of him seemed to grow bitterer and more violent, rankling deep in my heart with an intensity of pain that was almost physical. I cannot express the sick abhorrence that filled me and chilled me when I thought of him, nor the thrill of fear and repulsion that I experienced when I would hear his voice or his footstep, or when I would see his face.

Yes; if he would only have consented to let me go away from him, I am sure it would have been different. But the thought that by an intimidation more galling, more humiliating, and more efficacious than main force, I was compelled to live with him in spite of myself, was like a constant irritating thorn in my brain; and our daily meetings were like daily thrustings of the thorn in deeper still. It came to the point where I could not look at him, but my hatred burned in my eyes; where I could not speak to him, but it vibrated in my voice. And then, my knowledge of its hopelessness. . . ! That it must go on and on like this forever! Until I died, unless . . . unless he died first! That no escape from it was imaginable, except in the death of one of us! It was all very wrong and terrible, but if I am to tell the truth, I must tell it, again and again I caught myself saying to myself, "Oh, I wish that he was dead! There is no hope possible for me so long as he lives. Oh, I wish that he was dead!"

It was the first season I had ever passed in London, that summer of 1886. Of course we were very busy, going and receiving. I was presented at the next drawing-room held after our arrival; then followed a breathless whirl of dinners and dances, routs, rowdies, theatricals, I know not what all. For a while, as I have said, Prince Léonticheff's attitude toward me was tacitly conciliatory; but gradually, as he saw no sign of relenting on my part, his patience began to fail; it was plain that he was growing angry and angrier; till, finally, so to speak, the air between us became heavy with suppressed ill-feeling, and I lived in perpetual terror of an explosion.

At last, one night toward the end of June, the explosion came. We had given a dinner, and a reception after it. Then, when our guests had gone, and I was about to retire to my own apartments, he said, "I should like a few minutes' talk with you. Come into the library."

In the library he announced, "I am leaving London in the morning, to go to Russia. It appears that malignant typhus has broken out in the south-east, among my peasantry, and they are dying by the hundreds. I'm going down there to see what it is like. I shall probably send some letters about it to the *Beacon*. I shall leave in the morning before you are awake."

He paused, and waited in manifest expectation that I would say something to show admiration of his courage, or concern for the danger to which he was about to expose himself. But—to my shame, perhaps, it should be acknowledged—the only thought or feeling that his announcement aroused in me was one of relief at the prospect of a period of separation from him. He waited for me to speak until the silence became painful, when, very tactlessly, I asked, "How long will you be away?"

He looked at me with a smile that was grim and contemptuous, nodding his head. At the end of a minute he uttered a dry little laugh.

"Ha! That's just what I expected. I tell you that I am going to a pestilence region, carrying my life in my hands; and all you have to say is, how long shall I be gone? . . . That's the only aspect of the affair that interests my wife. Well, I shall be gone about a month. Perhaps a little longer, perhaps not quite so long. We are engaged for a cruise on the Tchernobog in August, and I shall of course be back in time to start on that. I'll keep you informed of my movements by telegraph."

"And you wish me to stay on here in Salchester House?" I queried, more for the sake of saying something than because I had any doubt or curiosity.

"Why, I don't see but that you'll have to. We've invited people for a good many evenings ahead, and we've accepted a good many invitations. I don't see but you will have to stay here to do the honors."

"Yes, of course," I assented.

For several minutes neither of us spoke.

At length I rose, as if to withdraw, and asked, "Is that all?"

"Well, as I told you, I shall leave in the morning without seeing you. This is the last occasion we shall have to talk together till I come back. If you have anything to say to me, you'd better say it now."

"I have nothing to say to you."

Again there was a minute of silence. I did not look at him, but somehow I knew that he had colored with anger, and that his eyes were fixed with no friendly gaze upon my face. Presently, still without looking at him, I began to move toward the door. Just as I had got my hand upon the knob of it. . . .

"Come back here!" he cried out.

Each word was short, loud, sudden, and big with passion. The sound of them struck me like a blow. I stood still, trembling, but I did not take my hand from the door-knob, nor turn around.

"Let go that door-knob, and come back here," he cried again.

Then, as I still did not move, "Do you hear?" he screamed.

But I had no power to obey him. I was transfixed to the spot by fright.

Next moment he grasped my arms, dragged me back into the room, and half pushed, half flung, me into a chair.

"Now, then, you may just sit there till I tell you to get up," he said.

His face was terrible, purple and swollen with congested blood. His eyes were lowering and vicious, and he kept them half closed as he looked at me.

"By God! I wish a stranger could be present to see the way you carry yourself toward me," he said. "He'd wonder at my patience. He'd wonder I didn't kill you."

He strode backward and forward through the room for a bit, then came to a halt before me.

"You may have nothing to say to me," he went on, "but I have something to say to you, and I'll thank you to give me your attention while I say it."

He drew up a chair, and sat down, facing me, with his knees touching mine.

"Now," he said, "I called you in here to-night, not only to tell you that I was going to Russia, but also because I wanted to give you a chance, before I went, to apologize to me for the manner in which you've seen fit to demean yourself ever since that day in the train coming from Nice. I've stood your damned airs and nonsense just as long as I intend to. Now you may beg my pardon, and mend your ways. Or else, by God, I'll make you repent it! There's a limit even to my good nature, and you've reached it. Now you may open your mouth and talk. I don't intend to let you sulk and mope about this house any longer."

"What do you wish me to apologize for?" I queried. "Do you wish me to beg pardon for the blow you struck me in the train?"

He sprang to his feet in a fury, and shook his fist at me.

"You petty-minded, mean-spirited shrew!" he cried. "Good heavens, how can any human being, with human blood in her veins, nurse and cherish rancor as she does! It takes a little contemptible penny-counting school-mistress, by Jove, to be as small as that! Oh, good God, why did I ever lift you out of the squalor in which I found you, to make a lady of you, you who have the soul of a fish-wife? I'll just give you one piece of advice, however, and you'd better bear it in mind. Don't you throw that incident in the railway carriage in my teeth again, don't you taunt me with it again, or I'll repeat it with compound interest."

"Brute!" I muttered. In my anger, the word came out independently of any volition on my part.

"Hold your tongue," he shouted. "If you take to calling names, I may meet you and beat you on your own ground. Now what I have to say to you is this. Hitherto I've been your friend; I've put up with your moods and your tantrums, and borne your insults, and done everything that a friend could do to smooth your path for you, and make you comfortable and contented. But now you've gone too far. From this night on, you may count me as your enemy. Look out for me. You hate me. Well, I'll return the compliment henceforward, and hate you. Look out for me. You've spurned my love till you've tired it out. Now beware of my hatred. I tell you, until you come to me grovelling on your knees and licking the dust at my feet, and fawn like a dog to be taken back in my good graces, you'd better be on your guard. You've gone too far; you drive me to take reprisals. You'll find I'm a good hater."

"Thank you," I replied. "I much prefer your hatred to what you call your love. It is not quite so loathsome."

"So? Ah, well, time will show. I think your opinion on that score will be more valuable a year hence than it is at present. I think I can lead you a dance. I will pay you back in your own coin, and I'll pay you a sovereign for your every shilling. The fun of it all is, of course, that you'll have to be entirely submissive, and to do everything pretty much as I wish you to, because you must never allow yourself to forget that I hold your father's fate in my hands as a sort of bond or guarantee for your good behavior. That's what makes the situation pretty. The circumstance that your father will have to suffer for any little sins of yours, will doubtless have the effect of keeping you within bounds."

"You coward!" I said between my teeth.

"Faugh! You ——!" he retorted; I cannot repeat his word. He spat into my face.

It all seems very petty and contemptible, I suppose, and unworthy of being recorded. But at the time it was of the utmost hideous seriousness to me,—to us, perhaps I ought to say,—and I record it as part of the explanation of the unquestionably grave events that ultimately followed.

Up to this point, I think I have been able, in telling my story, to take a reasonably impartial view of it,—to make allowances for Prince Léonticheff, and to recognize my own share of the blame. But beyond this point I cannot do so. When I think of the things that happened during the next four years, my heart burns again with rage and mortification, I hate him again with as great intensity as if he were still visible before me in the flesh, and I cannot help thinking that it was all his fault, all, all his fault. Because he forced me to live with him! Why could he not have allowed me to go away? Then the things that I must recount would never have come to pass; separated, we could have lived our own lives in peace. But he forced me to live with him. Why? He must have known that I could never forgive him his last outrage; that after that, all possibility of reconciliation between us was destroyed. And yet he forced me to go on living with him, so that every circumstance of my life operated to keep my wound open; every circumstance and condition of my life served to remind me of my grievance. He forced me to live with him; and I cannot see but he alone was responsible for the consequences of his doing so. I believe his reason for so forcing me was simply this: I had worn out his patience, I had angered him profoundly, he had come to reciprocate my hatred, and now he wished to have me constantly in his house, constantly under his hand, so that he might, as he had said, take reprisals; he forced me to live with him so that he might torture me, and thus taste the sweetness of revenge. Of course, when it is a question of the motives of so unusual a person as Prince Léonticheff, I may possibly be mistaken; but I have thought and thought, and that is the only theory of his conduct which seems to me to explain it.

But if I had hated him before, conceive how I hated him now! Now that it had come to open war; now that in cold blood he had determined to "lead me a dance!" With a hatred that was all the more hot and furious, because it was impotent and dumb—because there was nothing it could say or do to satisfy itself. Here I was, compelled to live with him; compelled to live with this great coarse hulking red-faced boor and bully; compelled to pass my life in his company, to eat at the same table with him, to travel with him, to be his property, his slave, his thing; to sacrifice all privacy to him, to hold myself in constant readiness for his commands, to come when he called, to submit to his every appetite or caprice; compelled to play the wife, the wife, to this man who had struck me, who had spat upon my face, who had crushed and outraged every instinct of pride, of sensitiveness, of self-respect, that I possessed! I was constrained to live and move and have my being in an atmosphere that was poisoned for me by his presence. The mere sight of him, the mere thought of him, made me recoil and shudder and grow sick at heart; the mere sound of his voice filled me with dismay; and yet I was his wife, he owned me, I had to live with him! Is it wonderful that my hatred of him gained in virulence? There was nothing I could do to escape him, nothing I could do to disarm him, I was completely, absolutely, in his power, at his mercy; utterly helpless to defend or to avenge myself. How could I help hating him with increasing fierceness? Of course, of course, my hatred was an evil thing, evil and shameful; I do not mean to justify it or excuse it; what I do mean is that it was also an inevitable thing, and not a thing for which I was responsible; I mean that I could not help it, that, evil as it was, I could no more help it than I could have helped falling sick of a fever if I had been exposed to contagion, than I could have helped bleeding if he had cut my flesh with a knife. And I mean, too, that it was a thing of his own making; that he kept my hatred alive by daily feeding it, that every day he injected a fresh supply of its poison into my blood. If he had allowed me to live away from him, I should not have hated him; I might even perhaps have forgotten what he had made me suffer, and have forgiven him.

What he *had* made me suffer! It had seemed a good deal at the time; but it was nothing, nothing, to what he made me suffer now. It is needless that I should tell the story in detail. I shall say enough when I say that he seemed to bring all his powers of invention upon the task he had set himself, the task of "leading me a dance;" the task of annoying me, humiliating me, hurting me. He had come to hate me; that was not to be wondered at; we were mutually antipathetic; and his hatred of me was as natural as my hatred of him. But there was this difference: he had the upper hand; he could wreak his hatred upon me; and he did not neglect to do so. "You will find that I am a good hater," he had warned me; his warning proved to be quite true.

Certain of the measures that he took to the end of causing me pain, were, however, rather ineffectual. I suppose I had become dulled and hardened; at all events, I did not mind especially when he would bring one of his mistresses to stay in the house, and force me to do the honors to her, abusing me in her presence, and making love to her in mine; I could not take that sort of thing very tragically, it was too despicable, it was beneath contempt. I did not mind especially, either, when he would set one of his male parasites on to make love to me. What I suffered most from was the general necessity I was under to live with him, and the sense of isolation and defencelessness that it engendered; the feeling that my life was being stolen from me and wasted, a waste as hopeless as it was purposeless, "like water spilled upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again;" and the loss of self-respect that must befall anyone who is conscious of leading an empty, useless life—the humiliation, the despair. After that, the thing I suffered most from was his talk. I can give no idea how nauseous it was. He let himself go; and in my presence, and sometimes in my presence and in that of others as well, he would say things so impossible in their vileness that I cannot write them down, so incredible in their vileness that I cannot conceive a human being even thinking them in the silence of his own brain, much less giving them utterance before a woman. Some Russians are said to be like that. He appeared to derive an exquisite satisfaction from the spectacle of the horror and disgust he contrived thus to inspire in me, and to enjoy keenly my inability to silence him, or to leave his presence. Among other things, he wrote a set of verses—oh, but a set verses!—in the Russian language. Then, one day, when he and I were lunching together *en tête-à-tête*, he insisted upon reading them aloud to me, in the hearing of the servants. Of course the servants were English and did not understand a syllable of Russian; but that fact did not mitigate the miserable shame and sickness that I felt. At this moment the coarse brutal laughter with which he punctuated his reading, seems to vibrate again in my ears.

But I cannot dwell on this; the mere memory of it is too painful. From his talk I think I suffered more even than from his blows, though whenever he became particularly angry with me now, he did not hesitate to cuff or kick me. At the time, a blow from him would infuriate me far more than a word; on a hundred occasions, when he struck me, if I had had a weapon, and if I had been his equal in physical strength, I do not doubt I would have killed him; but looking upon it all from this distance, I find myself forgetting the blows, whereas the words come back to me with the same venemous force they had when they were spoken. . . . And always, always, he held over my head that threat of sending my father to Siberia, to tame me with, he said, when I manifested a rebellious spirit.

So I may pass over four years, and come to the spring of 1890, when again we were in London, at Salchester House. As I have said, a few days after our arrival he went away, not telling me where he was going, but promising to be gone a fortnight or three weeks.

PART V.

ARMIDIS.

I.

Among all the people whom I knew in London, there was no one I liked better than Miss Clotilde Wynn, the poet, who lived in Kensington Gore, in a house whose windows overlooked the Park. A few days after Prince Léonticheff's departure, I went to her in the afternoon for a cup of tea. While we were talking together I began to notice a little water-color drawing, in a passepartout frame, that stood on a table at my side. It represented the head and shoulders of a young man, twenty years old perhaps, with a thick, waving mane of brown hair, and a face of such unusual and exquisite beauty that I supposed it must be a fancy-sketch, the translation of a painter's ideal, and not a veritable portrait. Yet something in it, I could not tell what, teased me with a sense of familiarity, until, all at once, I exclaimed, "Why, that is just how Armidis must have looked thirty years ago. Armidis the composer."

"Why, but it is Armidis!" cried Miss Wynn. "Do you know him?"

I answered that he was one of my best and dearest friends.

"And one of mine, too," said she. "I knew him when I was a girl. Have you seen him lately?"

"I have not seen him since my marriage—four years ago."

"Why, but you know he is in town, of course?"

"No? I had not known it. Is it true? If it is, nothing, nothing could give me greater happiness than to see him. What is his address? I will write to him. It is strange he has not come to call on me. He must have known I was here."

"He has been living in London about a year. I see a good deal of him. He drops in to drink a cup of tea three or four times a week. You know I go out very little. Indeed, he said he was coming this afternoon; but I don't know that that is any reason for expecting him."

"Oh, I hope he will, I hope he will," I said. My heart was trembling. The prospect of seeing him, though it was altogether a pleasant one, agitated me very much.

"But, my dear, you are pale," cried Miss Wynn. There's a history. Tell it to me at once."

"No, there is no history. Only I saw a great deal of him when I was a girl in Paris. He was kind to me, and I was fond of him. And now, the thought of seeing him, it is so sudden and unexpected—you can understand . . ."

A servant entered, and announced, "Mr. Armidis."

Next moment Armidis himself, his face all smiles, and both of his fat hands extended, was bearing down upon us.

I was standing with my back toward the window, so that he could not have recognized me. At the sight of him, the tears sprang to my eyes; I could not help it; I was weeping in silence while he made his obeisance to the lady of the house.

Then Miss Wynn said, with a travesty of ceremoniousness, "I wish to present you to her Serene Highness the Princess Léonticheff. I think you have had the honor before."

Armidis gave a little start, and slowly turned his face toward me. All the color and all the sparkle had faded from it. It was white and grave and questioning. I still stood with my back to the window, so that my own face was always in shadow.

He did not speak for a minute. At last he said very low, "Not Monica?"

"Yes, Monica," I answered, also very low, and impulsively I moved toward him.

"Monica!" he repeated; it was like a sob.

"Aren't you going to shake hands with me?" I asked, putting out both of mine, and trying to smile down my tears.

"Oh, my child!" The words were scarcely audible. He took my hands, and held me off, and looked into my face with eyes that were eloquent of his emotion. By and by he drew a long breath, like a sigh; and his eyes became radiant with one of his bright, beautiful smiles; and "There, there! Dry your tears," he said. "The awful moment has passed; and now we may be quite commonplace and friendly again. I knew you were in London; I saw your arrival noted in the newspapers. Distinguished personage! But it hadn't occurred to me that we might meet. I, poor Bohemian, I am not of your world, you know."

"I think you might have come to see me," I said.

"I didn't dare. Park Lane is so grand. Besides, discretion is the better part of friendship; and though I knew you in your old earth-bound existence, I didn't want to haunt you in your present state of exaltation. I feel that I must be something like a ghost in your eyes."

"A most welcome one, and, fortunately, most substantial."

"Oh, now, how unkind of you! Why not tell me outright that I'm shamefully fat, and have done with it? Most substantial! . . . This lady," he announced, addressing Miss Wynn, "this lady and I were children together in Paris, a hundred years ago. Then she went off and got married, and we haven't seen each other since. Hence our tears."

With that, the talk became general, and remained so, until, at the end of an hour, Armidis rose to go. I followed his example, and we took leave of Miss Wynn together.

My carriage was waiting at the door in the street.

"Get in," I said. "You must come home with me. You must dine with me. You don't seem at all glad to see me. I . . . for me, it is the happiest moment I have known for four years."

"My dear, dear child," he returned, "I am so glad to see you—this meeting, all unforeseen, has moved me so deeply—I have quite lost my head. I have had to be matter-of-fact and nonchalant about it—you must let me be so a little longer—lest I should become incoherent."

"Very good. I will forgive you everything and anything, if you will only be nice now, and come home with me, and stay till I bid you depart."

"Ah, yes, I should like to above all things. But . . ."

"But . . . ?" I prompted, as he paused.

"But—your prince?"

"Oh, he is away. He is out of town."

"Then I will come. Though I confess, my feet will burn when I cross his threshold, and, if I eat of his salt, it will give me an indigestion."

We drove through the Park, already thronged with carriages, though the Season was but just beginning.

I think we were both of us still rather embarrassed. We had not recovered yet from the suddenness of our encounter, and the excess of our emotion. We found it hard to talk; and it was with an evident determination to say something, no matter what, that Armidis began to speak of Miss Wynn.

"What a nice creature that Clotilde is!" he exclaimed. "And she's written some extremely pretty verses. There's one thing I want you to explain to me. Why, with her wit, her beauty, and her wealth, why is she still a spinster, at the age of forty? How has she contrived to avoid the pitfall of matrimony? You were no prettier than she, you were poor, you weren't half so clever. And yet . . . !"

"Yes. If I had only been half so clever, perhaps it wouldn't have happened."

"But you had my cleverness quite at your service."

"The longer I live, the more I come to realize that we can't profit by the wisdom or the experience of others. We have to learn our own lessons, fight our own battles, alone and unaided."

"That sounds very deep, my dear, but it only means that we have to live our own lives. If it were otherwise, God might have stopped with Eve and Adam. It is the fact that after all we are infinitely individual, infinitely isolated from each other, that makes life interesting, and helps to make it worth while. Our souls are like stars gravitating millions of miles apart in space: we mingle our light a little, we describe orbits around one another, but we never touch."

"I don't see how life is worth while in any case. It may be interesting, like any other tragedy; but worth while . . . ! Is it worth while to suffer, without an object for our suffering? Yet that is what we have to do. We are told that we are born to trouble, which is bad enough. But to be born to aimless trouble . . . !"

"Oh, dear, me! What a pessimist we are! Shocking!"

"Aren't you a pessimist? I thought all wise men were pessimists."

"A pessimist? I? When there are peaches and sunshine in the world! Fie!"

"Well, I am glad to see one thing," said I; "you are always Armidis."

"Am I? Really? Oh, I'm so relieved to be assured of that. I'm often dubious of my own identity. To hear a disinterested third person vouch for it is such a comfort. And àpropos of that, tell me, tell me truly, are you always Monica?"

"I have every reason to believe so. Why?"

"Because, if you are, I think I can impart a little information to you, that will mitigate your pessimism somewhat, and perhaps convert you to the faith that it is rather worth while, after all."

"What is it? Tell me, quick."

Armidis turned his full face upon me, and held my eyes for a moment with a smiling, studious, mystifying gaze.

At last he said, "He is in London."

"He?" I repeated. "Who?"

"He? Who? Behold the dreadful soul of woman! He? Who? Or is it only affectation? Hypocrite! Of old there was but one He for you. Don't tell me that to-day there are many."

"Oh!" I gasped, as his meaning struck me; and I sank back in my place all in a tremor.

"Or rather, he isn't in London," he pursued. "But it's the same thing. He's somewhere down on the south coast. But he has a studio here, in Chelsea; and he's coming up to town in a day or two. So there!"

"Don't, don't," I begged.

There were a thousand questions I wanted to ask; but I had not the strength to pursue the subject; it was like suddenly uncovering the quick. I closed my eyes, and for two or three minutes neither of us spoke. Then we drew up at Salchester House.

II.

I LED him to my boudoir.

"There are so many things I can't understand," said he. "Of course I know it's none of my business, and you may snub me to your heart's content. But we can't play at mere acquaintanceship, you and I; we've tried, and it's been a failure. It must be all or nothing: close confederates, as we were in the old days, or strangers. I know so much, and I understand so little. I know, for instance, that he beats you. I know that every day, in every way, he defiles and outrages every finer instinct of your being. I know that he seeks to crush your individuality, to deprive you of all personal liberty, to reduce you to the condition of his mere thing and chattel. But what I don't know, what I can't understand, is why you submit to it, why you continue to live with him. I have waited and waited, from day to day, from year to year, to hear that you had left him. I have been nonplussed, amazed, horrified even, at your not doing so. I have conjectured about it in vain. Now if you love me, if you care for my love, explain it to me. What price does he pay you? Don't tell me it is the mere material advantage of your position, or the rank. I shouldn't believe that."

"How do you know these things?" I cried in consternation. "How do you know he beats me? Do you mean to say that it is common talk?"

"Common talk? I can't tell you whether it is common talk or not. I am not of your world, and you are not of mine. But one night—yes. I was at a club. I chanced to overhear three words dropped by a man who had been dining here with you and him. Only three words; but they were enough. Just as the naturalist, finding the claw of an antediluvian beast, will build up from it a truthful image of the whole animal, so I, from those few words, built for myself a model of your domestic situation. But I had known it all before, I had suspected, I had divined, it all; these words merely confirmed me in my belief. How do I know that three and two make five? I am acquainted with you to some small extent, and I am not entirely ignorant of the character of your Prince. You are an obstinate, opinionated little person, Monica, and he is a slightly impulsive man. In the course of nature you would necessarily irritate him a good deal, and he would instinctively resort to his fists. Oh, I know; I know everything; I know by intuition and inference."

He drew his chair up close to me, and took my hands, and looked into my eyes.

"It's this way, my dear," he said. "You see, I love you. If you were my own daughter I could not love you better than I do. And love of this sort is very far from blind. It is like a spur to the imagination. I know you and I know Léonticheff; therefore I know, I can guess, the whole sorry story. Ah, if there were but some way in which I could help you, shield you, make it easier for you! That is the thought, the wish, that has never left me since your marriage. Daily I have said to myself, 'She is far away, alone with him, alone with Léonticheff, utterly at his mercy, alone and suffering. And'—you remember Capponsacchi?—'here am I, "with a whole store of strengths, eating into my heart, craving employ; and she perhaps in need of a finger's help; and yet there is no way in the whole world to stretch out mine, and so relieve myself!"' Yes, it is a good deal as you said: we have to fight our own battles alone and unaided. But why don't you leave him? Where is your self-respect, your pride, your spirit? How can you go on eating at the table, living in the house, sharing the luxuries, of a man who degrades you so? I cannot understand it."

"Oh, it's simple enough," said I, laughing a little, nervously. "He holds my father as a hostage, as a bond and guarantee for my good behavior. Whether my father has done anything or not, I don't know. But the Prince warns me that if I leave him, he will cause my father to be arrested and transported to Siberia. He has my father watched constantly, so that he may not, at a possible hint from me, quit the country. He gave us a proof of his power and influence in Russia, when he procured my father's pardon. I don't dare to move. He would be sure to make good his threat."

"But—but he? What is his motive in all this? I should think, by this time, he too would desire a separation. Does he enjoy it? Is domestic infelicity like nectar in his cup?"

"Oh, don't ask me. I can't undertake to explain Prince Léonticheff. Or, rather, I dare say, the explanation is simply this: he regards me as a piece of property which he has bought and paid for, and he doesn't intend to let any of his property slip between his fingers. Then, I suspect, he finds it convenient to have a scapegoat constantly at hand, some one upon whom he can vent his spleen when the world is out of tune for him. Furthermore, is it not said that revenge is sweet? He feels that he has a grievance against me, in that I don't adore him, and he likes to keep me within reach, so that, by daily little applications of the torture, he may avenge himself."

"It is terrible, terrible," said Armidis; "but the most terrible thing of all is the tone in which you speak of it."

"Oh," I cried, "it is a horrid, dark, sickening coil. Don't pry into it."

"Ah, that is better. Speak seriously and feelingly about it. Your cynicism made my flesh creep. Then it is a condition of things that can only end with the death of one of you. I believe I should do you a kindness if I killed you."

"Thank you. I should very much prefer it if you would kill him."

"Oh, don't, don't, Monica," he groaned. "There are things which, in a case like this, you shouldn't say even to me, you shouldn't say even in jest. Besides, I don't like to feel that you *can* jest about it, no matter how bitterly. It seems somehow sacrilegious. It is too grimly, awfully serious."

"Yes, it's pretty serious," I admitted. "I don't mean to jest about it. But if I speak about it too seriously I shall go into hysterics, or something. Oh, you can never know how miserable I am, or how I hate him."

After a long pause, Armidis said, "I told you that Julian North is in London—that he has a studio in Chelsea."

"Yes . . . " I responded.

My temples began to throb, and something caught in my throat, and made it tingle. He had come back to the subject that had not left my mind since he had first introduced it, which I longed to hear him speak of, and yet which I could not help dreading and shrinking from, as I would dread and shrink from the touch of a knife.

"And you do not ask me a single question about him!" cried Armidis. "I should think you would be interested to hear my news of him. If only for old sake's sake! Or is your indifference merely feigned? Hypocrite!"

"What do you wish me to ask? I questioned.

My voice sounded faint and thin to me, and my heart trembled so!

"Well, for instance, you might ask how he is getting on."

"Well, tell me then, how is he getting on?" . . . Oh, such a strange, painful, sinking feeling within me!

"He is getting on famously. He is becoming the fashion. He has been here less than a year, and already he is distinctly a success. Portraits, you know; portraits of the aristocracy. He's immensely clever; he has improved wonderfully in his technique."

"I am delighted to hear it. Of course I knew he was bound to succeed sooner or later. Do you . . ." My voice failed me; I had to pause and recover it. . . . "Do you see much of him?"

"Oh, a little, a little, some thirty-six hours in every twenty-four. That is to say, he has adopted me. We share a house together. A house, if you please, no mere beggarly bachelor chambers. Oh, we're domesticity incarnate. We have a cook and a maid-servant and a man-servant, and we're extremely smart. I wear his old clothes, and he profits by my experience, if you'll admit that to be possible for the nonce. We have a monstrous fine studio, wherein he paints by day, and I compose by night: a sort of æsthetic Box and Cox arrangement. We give the nicest little afternoon teas every Wednesday, and if you're very good, perhaps I will procure you a card. Miss Wynn comes. We live in Church Street, and just around the corner from us is the home of that gentleman whom Julian designates as the greatest painter of all time, and with whose acquaintance we are honored. Environment! It is everything. We paint, and compose, and sing our songs, and exhibit our pictures, and are altogether to be envied. Just at present, as I told you, my painter is out of town, and I'm disconsolate. He's a most aquatic beast, amphibious, and he's fled to the south coast for a watery week or two. Have you been to the

Academy yet? The Grosvenor? You must go. We have a lot of portraits. One of myself that's just too pretty for anything. And what a crowd we had Show-Sunday! Celebrities! Nobilities! Everything short of Royalties, and they'll have to come to us in time, or the throne will lose its prestige. Oh, he's a good lad, is Julian; but not so young as when you knew him. Let me see . . . I fancy he's about one-and-thirty, and old for his age. You see, he has suffered a good deal—*histoire de femme.* And you will be twenty-nine? Not so?"

"Yes, twenty-nine."

"Your indifference puzzled me and troubled me at first, Monica, but now I've come to like it. I like it because it's so transparent. At first it struck me as opaque, and I hate indifference when it is opaque; but now I can see through it like a glass. I perceive a hundred questions trembling unspoken on your lips; that's right; let them remain tacit. I will answer them. First, then, yes, I mean it, he has suffered a good deal, on account of a certain woman. But we'll leave that for the moment, to return to it later. Secondly, no, we don't talk of that woman very often. When we first met, now some eleven months ago, we talked of nothing else for a while: until, that is, he thought he had pumped from me all the information concerning her that I would yield. Then, little by little, we dropped the subject. We found it, if you must know, too painful. It interfered with our work, it destroyed our repose of mind. No, I have never told him that her husband was a brute, whom they had compelled her to marry against her will; I regarded my knowledge of that fact as in a sense privileged and confidential. Whatever he knows of the quality and savor of her Prince, he has gathered from other lips than mine. Yes, it is very rarely nowadays that we mention her. Poor youth, he has never been able to forget, and it's always therefore a sore subject with him. Has he explained his silence to me, that criminal silence, which was, when all is said, the cause of the evil that followed? To be sure he has; and it was just as I had supposed. He was permitted to write to the lady in question once a month, and then only such cool conventional letters as her father might with propriety look over. Well, one day, when the time for writing his monthly letter had come round, he found himself in the deepest depths of melancholy and discouragement. Everything had gone wrong with him; he had no money; he had pawned his last pawnable possession; what was worse, he could not work, and he believed that he had lost his talent; he believed that his hand had forgot her cunning. He was lonesome, he was in despair, and he was hungry. Then he thought, 'What is the use of my writing to her? It's a hopeless case. It never can come to anything. I, who haven't the price of a dinner in my pocket, what right have I to keep her reminded of me? If I have any sentiment of honor in my heart, I must help her to forget me. I must efface myself. I must not write to her any more.' . . . Of course he was insane: one of those periodic attacks of dementia to which all artists are subject. Insane, or worse; I plead insanity, because, if he was in his sound mind, then there's no excuse for him. Well, he remained insane for some time, some weeks or months. Meanwhile, two or three letters had come to him from her; and he—the young maniac!—what do you suppose he had done with them? He had burned them, without opening them! He said he felt that under the circumstances, and in view of the resolution he had taken, he had no right to read them! Quixote! Then, with the lapse of time, he recovered his wits, his insanity slipped from him like a foul garment, he was himself again, and—he realized what he had done;

you know, if you're really curious. But if we must talk of something else, let's talk of dinner. The more I consider it, the less disposed I find myself to dine with you here. Really, in all seriousness, I shall have no appetite for my food, and what I eat would stick in my throat, if Prince Léonticheff pays for it. Come! I have a scheme. A lark! If you want to be very kind to me, and show that you're not proud or anything, you will come and dine with me. It will be like old times. Don't you remember? We will make believe we are a boy and girl again. What say you?"

"Where? Where do you want to go?"

"Where? Why, to our house, of course. There's a dinner all prepared awaiting me there; and I assure you our cook is not to be despised. We shall be quite alone. Julian is a hundred miles away. Just our two dear little selves. There! Be nice, and say that you will come."

"Oh, no. I thought you meant a restaurant. I can't go to your house. I mustn't."

"Yes, yes, you can, you must. What harm? I am so old, you know, and a friend of your infancy, besides. It will be like a resurrection of dead days. Ah, don't be silly and conventional and cruel! You can't deny me this one little request. There's no earthly chance of anything happening that you wouldn't like. I tell you he's a hundred miles away. And think of the pleasure it would give me. And you, yourself, wouldn't you enjoy it a little? I want to show you our studio, our garden."

"Oh, I should enjoy it very much. But I feel that I oughtn't. The idea frightens me."

"There! If you would enjoy it, I'll hear no more. On with your hat and off with us."

The temptation was strong, and I was weak. We walked out together, and took a hansom, and were driven to Church Street, Chelsea.

III.

During the first half of our drive we chatted together merrily and vivaciously about such impersonal topics as the moment and the event suggested; but after we had turned from Knightsbridge into Sloane Street our tongues began to lag, and by the time we had left Sloane Square behind us, and entered the King's Road, our talk had quite died out. We went on from thence to the end in that sort of nervous silence which falls upon people who feel themselves to be approaching an unusual and critical situation.

Probably we were each absorbed by our respective thoughts, conjectures, and misgivings. For me as I realized that we were drawing near to our destination, my courage began to ooze away, giving place to a sensation very like terror, and my hands and arms grew cold up to my elbows. When at last the cab came to a stand-still, and Armidis, having alighted, turned to help me to do likewise, I felt so faint and frightened that I shrank back, saying, "No, I can't, I can't."

He looked at me, and understood.

"*Allons, pas de faiblesse!*" he urged, and offered me his hand.

"No. I ought not to have come. And now I can't go in. Take me back home."

"Oh, really now, I can't have that, you know," he grieved.

And getting hold of my hand, he pulled at it, very gently, but with such persuasiveness and such determinayou know, if you're really curious. But if we must talk of something else, let's talk of dinner. The more I consider it, the less disposed I find myself to dine with you here. Really, in all seriousness, I shall have no appetite for my food, and what I eat would stick in my throat, if Prince Léonticheff pays for it. Come! I have a scheme. A lark! If you want to be very kind to me, and show that you're not proud or anything, you will come and dine with me. It will be like old times. Don't you remember? We will make believe we are a boy and girl again. What say you?"

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And getting hold of my hand, he pulled at it, very gently, but with such persuasiveness and such determination, that presently I found myself standing on the pavement beside him.

"We are pale," he laughed; "but our pallor is interesting and becoming, and it sets off admirably our big dark eyes. Our lair is not very terrible, and I promise you safe-conduct. But first, please examine and appreciate our exterior."

It was a one-storied house, built in the style of Southern Europe, covered with yellow stucco, and roofed with red tiles; and its façade was pierced by only one window, a small grated window, high up above the door, so that the effect was rather oriental.

"It was built by a South American," Armidis explained. "It's horribly out of place in London, but I like it all the same. It encloses three sides of a court, and all our windows look into that. In the middle of the court there is a fountain, and beyond, the garden. Come in."

He opened the door with a latch-key, and led me through a short passage into a great room lighted by a big north window, furnished and decorated as a studio, and smelling strongly of paints. I felt like one in a trance, or half unconscious. I sank upon the first chair I came to, and closed my eyes. My heart was beating so hard I could scarcely breathe.

"For heaven's sake, don't tell me you are going to faint," he cried piteously.

"Oh, no, no, I'm all right," I answered, making an effort to possess myself. "A little tired, that's all."

"I'm sorry," he went on, "our shop is almost empty. Most of our stock has gone to the exhibitions: the Salon, you know, the Academy—yes, we condescend to the Academy; it's only fair that they should have a few good things, if but to teach the public how bad the others are —the Grosvenor, the New. Still I can show you one or two little trifles that may interest you, and the portrait we are at work on now—a portrait of Lady Emily Chaldicott. A duke's daughter! Oh, I told you we were smart; and if you favor us with an order, you will be in your proper element—among your own kind. Princess! . . . Besides, there's always the room itself, for you to look at. It's been a good deal admired. Take my arm, and let me personally conduct you."

I took his arm, and walked about the room with him, looking at the canvases he pointed out, and listening to his running commentaries on them. But I could not interest myself in these things at that time. One thought, that seemed to include all others, filled my brain: "This is his room. I am in his room. The room he works in. This is his room, his room, his room." It was almost as if I were in contact with a part of himself; in communion with him; with him who had so long ago died out of my life, after filling it, and now again suddenly was revisiting it, like a ghost. My emotions were too many and too turbulent to leave me any mind wherewith to appreciate his pictures.

"Well, I must say," cried Armidis, at last, in impatience, "you are hard to move. Unsatisfactory! Not a word of praise. Come, you are unworthy of your privilege. We will go into the garden."

A door from the studio led into the court.

"Here is our fountain," said Armidis. "Perhaps you will admire *that*."

"I admire everything," I assured him. "Only I don't gush. Yes, the fountain is very pretty."

"Our South-American was a sculptor, who had a lot of money and some real talent, and one day blew his brains out. This fountain is his own work. Venus rising from the Sea. The tritest of themes, but not badly done. Stay. I will turn the water on."

He turned the water on, and we stopped a moment to watch the fountain play. Then we went from the court into the garden.

"I hate to keep vaunting my merchandise," he said, "but I must impress upon you that this is a charming garden. The greensward, eh? And the old red walls, covered with ivy, eh? And the beds of geranium! And the rose-bushes! And the struggling fig-trees! And our jolly old oak, which was growing here when our grandfathers were children! Isn't it nice, now? Let us sit down yonder, on that bench."

We sat down on the bench.

"This is the best hour for it, too," he said; "with the sunset colors in the sky. Do you see? We are screened from all inquisitive eyes. Nothing is visible of our neighbors but their house-tops. I feel that I must smoke a cigarette."

Having lighted his cigarette, he began again. . . .

"Do you know, Monica, you upset all my theories, all my little pet notions and hypotheses. Most unkind of you."

"What are they, the theories that I upset?"

"First tell me this, what is your ruling passion"

"My ruling passion? Oh, that's a hard question. I don't think I have one. If I have, I don't know what it is."

"Well, I mean, what is the most frequent, the most constant, of your emotions? What is the feeling most often in your heart?"

"Oh!" I exclaimed.

"Well?" he questioned.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm afraid no very good one."

"Is it not—let us be frank—is it not a feeling of bitterness? A feeling of rancor in thinking of your spoiled life, and of hatred for the man who has spoiled it?"

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps so. Why?"

"Because I have always entertained an innocent little theory to the effect that one's ruling passion, one's most frequent emotion, must have a direct influence upon one's physical character and personal appearance. I have thought that if one's ruling passion were good and sweet, it would necessarily end by beautifying one; and contrariwise, if it were bad and bitter, one would grow ugly to the eye."

"Ah, I see. And you find that I have grown ugly to the eye!"

"No, no, no, *tutt' altro!* That is just the point. I said that you upset my theories, not that you confirmed them. I find that you have grown wonderfully, terribly beautiful; and that is what puzzles me. You were a sufficiently pretty girl, my dear; you had eyes, you had hair, you had a skin. But you were too thin, you looked as though, if a man blew on you, you'd evaporate. Now you've rounded out; and the character of your beauty has deepened and mellowed. Your eyes were always strange and attractive; now they're . . .! You're still pale, but your pallor is warm, where of old time it was cold. And your hair is darker than it was, and more becoming. Altogether you've improved. I hope for his own sake poor Julian will not see you. And all this improvement has taken place in spite of a passion, an emotion, that is evil, dominating your heart. I don't know what to make of it."

"I am afraid your eyes are becoming dim. I can see in my glass that I am growing hard-looking, tired-looking, just as in truth I am growing hard and tired in spirit. I am happy to-day; perhaps that has refreshed and softened me a little. But I know that ordinarily I look hard and cold and tired. I can see it myself, and I have heard other people say so."

"I suppose a great many men have fallen in love with you? I confess at once that I should do so if I were thirty years younger than I am."

"On the contrary, so far from many, not *any* men have fallen in love with me."

"You can never make me believe that."

"Nevertheless, it is the fact."

"Impossible. That they have never declared their passions I can well believe. You have a forbidding manner. But that does not prove that they haven't *felt.*"

"Oh, for the declaring, yes! At one time it was a favorite amusement of my husband's to set his creatures on to declare love to me, and to persecute me with their addresses. It wearied me, it disgusted me, but I couldn't take it very tragically, it was so absurdly despicable; so in the end he tired of it. Those are the only adventures of the sort that I have had."

"I told you he was a beast before you married him," said Armidis.

"Yes, but I was a fool, and I didn't believe you."

"If I were you, I wouldn't live with him another day. I don't believe for a moment that he'd molest your father."

"The mere possibility that he might, is enough."

"How old is your father?"

"Oh, don't, don't!" I cried. "Enough evil thoughts visit my mind, as it is. That is the one that I have tried and tried never to allow to enter it."

"Yet it is a question of some one's death."

"Yes, Prince Léonticheff's, or mine. No one else's."

"Prince Léonticheff is a very robust person."

"Yes, I know that. But robust people die. I wish he was dead from the bottom of my soul. Now do you believe I am hard? I would not go so far as to hire a man to kill him; but if a man would kill him without consulting me, I would give him my whole inheritance by way of reward. Now do you believe I am hard?"

"You say things that you don't really mean. Oh, yes, you think you mean them. Superficially you mean them; your meaning is skin-deep. Down at the bottom, though, you mean nothing of the kind. If Prince Léonticheff should die, you would be inexpressibly shocked and grieved. For death is always a shocking thing, and the death of a brute beast like him is trebly so. Eventually, however, you would be happy. If he died a natural death, you would eventually be the gainer by it. But if he died by your connivance—never! You would only change the form of your misery. You would exchange what you suffer now for something worse—remorse. What you ought to do is plain. Leave him. Leave him, and let him exact the penalty from your father if he will. I don't know why your father shouldn't pay, as well as you. You would have all public sympathy and opinion on your side. In the face of that, he wouldn't dare to molest your father."

"He could cause my father to be hanged to-morrow without letting his own name once appear. No, I cannot leave him. Some day I shall probably take poison. I If weren't such a coward! But some day I shall have the courage of despair, and then it will end."

"I think we had better change the subject," said Armidis. "It is getting dark and chilly. Suppose we go into the house and have our dinner."

After dinner, he said, "You asked me what I had been doing lately. Just these last few days I have been writing a little melody for that old French *brunette—Encore que je sois jeunette.* I will sing it for you."

I played the accompaniment, reading from his manuscript, and he sang his song.

"Isn't it like old times?" he demanded. "Dear me! It makes me feel young again."

"It is delightfully and painfully like old times," I confessed.

"Now," said he, "I want to do that brunette into English verse of the same measure, so that it can be sung to my tune. You are an old translatress. Will you help me?"

And then I spent a perfectly happy evening, helping him do the brunette into English verse. When at last we had finished one stanza to our satisfaction, it was so late that I had to go home. He accompanied me, as we had come, in a hansom.

> "Though I'm scarce a woman grown,
>   I have still my true-love sweet;
> He is mine, he is my own;
>   And to-night we two shall meet. . .
> Yet when I hear his footfall near
> All my heart is thrilled with fear. . .

Yes, it will do very fairly, very fairly," he said. "But when will you come again? When can we resume our labors? Julian will not return for a good week yet."

"Oh, I will come whenever you like," I answered. "I have enjoyed it so much."

"Will you come to-morrow?"

"I have a lot of engagements for to-morrow; but I will break them all, and come."

"You are an angel. I will call for you, and fetch you. About five o'clock. I am so glad to see that you have not grown proud. Princess!"

"If you call me that, if you remind me of that, I will not come, after all."

"Oh, forgive me. It was an ill-timed jest. Good-night."

IV.

"Ah!" exclaimed Armidis, as we entered the studio in Chelsea the next afternoon, "a letter! A letter on the mantel!"

He picked the letter up, and held it out at arm's length, so that we could both see its superscription. It was in Julian's handwriting.

"We will open it and read it together," he said; and tore off the envelope.

Then we sat down side by side upon a sofa, and read the letter. It was dated that same morning, from Greal, Sussex, and it ran as follows . . .

'Dear A.:

"I have had an extremely odd adventure, one of those that look like ironical pre-arrangements on the part of Fate, but are in reality, I suppose, only accidental coincidences. You will see some report of it, no doubt, in this evening's papers; but the news-gatherers are ignorant of that which gives it point.

"Yesterday afternoon a brisk southwest wind sprang up in this quarter of the world, which rapidly strengthened into half a gale, so that the waters became white with trouble as far as eye could see, and what sails there were about began to put in for shelter. Presently arrived one of the village fishing-boats; and the skipper announced that he had passed a man clinging to the bell-buoy that floats some three miles out in the Channel. He had tried, he said, to approach near enough to take the poor devil off, but the sea was running so high, and the buoy was pitching about in such unruly fashion, that that had proved impossible. He had not even been able to get within speaking distance, and find out who the fellow was, or how he came in such a sorry plight. So, the conclusion was, there hung the man at the present moment, unless he had already lost his hold, very like to drown.

"The affair interested me a good deal; and after some enquiring about, and a lot of parleying and haggling, I finally hired a steam tug to take me out. It was roughish, there's no denying that. But we managed easily enough to come up within a few hundred feet of the buoy, and there surely enough was the man. The tug's captain refused to go any nearer—for which, however, he could not be blamed, because it really would have been dangerous. But we contrived with some labor to launch a small boat, and a couple of stout men rowed me up to within shouting distance of the buoy.

"It was pitching about unmercifully, and we were doing likewise. We would go up, and the buoy would go down; then we would go down and the buoy would go up; and it was like a wet game of see-saw, to which the deafening clang-clang of the bell kept time. Well, I had a rope, with a noose at its end, like a halter or a lariat; and I yelled out to the castaway to catch it, and gave it a fling. But he didn't budge. He simply lifted up his voice, and remarked that if I wanted to get him off that buoy I must come and take him, because he explained, he was so giddy and so exhausted that he didn't dare to let go even with one hand long enough to grab the rope. Thereat we engaged in a little argument, which was tiresome, seeing that the bell drowned more than half we said, and anyhow, I saw that he was bound to get the best of it, and that there was nothing for it, but I must take a bath. Which I did. I hung on to the rope with my teeth, and I swam out to the buoy, and finally managed to fasten my noose about the man's waist; and then I called out to the boatmen to haul the rope in, and they hauled, and by and by, to cut a long story short, we were all safe and sound again on board the tug, and steaming back to Greal.

"Well, my gentleman was really pretty badly used up; and at first his observations were few and not especially luminous. But some warm clothes, and a nip of spirits, went a long way toward reviving him; and presently his tongue got loosened, and then he proved to my satisfaction that he had a supreme talent for wagging it. He talked ten thousand words an hour for the next three hours.

"He said he had been out in a small pleasure boat, and a squall had struck him from behind, and capsized him; and he had managed to reach that buoy, and there he had been hanging between sea and sky for a matter of six hours. He seemed to be an effusive as well as a loquacious sort of creature, and quite overwhelmed me with expressions of his gratitude. 'There's one thing I can assure you of, my friend,' he said, 'and that is that you won't repent it. I don't know who you are, or what your station in life may be; but I can just tell you this, that, whoever and whatever you are, I'm not the man to forget a favor, and my position is such as to enable me to reward you royally. You may reasonably count this as the most profitable day's business you have ever transacted in the course of your life.' . . .

"From which, dear chum, I concluded that I had rescued either a lord or a lunatic.

"'I see, you don't recognize me,' he went on, 'but then I gather from your accent that you're an American, so that's not to be wondered at. Well, when I tell you who

I am, you will begin to realize what a monstrous stroke of good luck has befallen you.'

"Well, now, Armidis, guess a little who he was. No, none of the Royal Highnesses; no, not Mr. Gladstone, or Lord Salisbury, or Parnell; no, nor yet a maniac escaped from an asylum. . . .

"He was, he is—the Prince Léonticheff! . . . Her husband!

"Oh, how I should like to be on the spot, to see you jump around, and hear you howl, when this intelligence reaches you! That I, I, I should have been instrumental in prolonging the life of her husband! Surely, Destiny went out of her way to be ironical. As you see, I laugh about it; but I suspect it is the laughter of nervousness; down deep it makes me feel cold. It seems somehow full of an uncanny significance, which I cannot understand.

"But tell me this one thing, you who know: will she be glad or sorry? He is apparently a most eccentric person, with a monumental opinion of himself, and divers other peculiarities equally grotesque. He tells me, for instance, that he has written the greatest novel in the English language! But I should judge him, notwithstanding, to be entirely well-meaning and good-natured; and probably she is fond of him, and will be glad. Anyhow, I hope so—for her sake.

"But suppose she is unhappy with him?

"You have told me so little about the circumstances of her marriage, and the character of her husband; yet somehow I have gathered the impression that it was a marriage rather forced upon her, and that he was not a man to make her happy. I may have mistaken your intention, but I have certainly surmised—more from your very silence, your very reticence, perhaps, than from anything you have said—that it was forced upon her against her will, and that Léonticheff was not an angel. Then I have heard stories about him, remarks, and little anecdotes, elsewhere; and altogether I have got a notion that . . . well, you understand. Now if this is so? If she is unhappy with him, and was at the point of being delivered from him? And then I, I of all men, stepped in to interfere! That would be too much.

"I say he seems a good-natured person, and so he does; but he is not beautiful, he is not dainty or delicate; and when I look at him, at his fat red face, his double-chin, his slouching burly figure, and then realize what his relation is to her—well to tell you the truth, my gorge rises, and I cannot believe she cares for him. She, the most sensitive and high-souled woman that was ever born! I cannot believe that she cares for these fifteen stone of flesh. I cannot help thinking that life with him must be a perpetual squirm and shudder for her. But very likely I am allowing my imagination to run riot; very likely my wish is the father of my thought.

"You see, the whole affair has excited me rather.

"One thing is odd—he does not know who I am, though I have told him my name, and that I am a painter. Do you mean to say he has never heard of me? . . . Had I become already a thing forgotten and never mentioned, when he arrived in Paris, only a year or so after my departure? But never mind. I can't talk it over on paper. There are so many things I want to ask, I should have to write a volume. When I see you—which, D.V., will be to-morrow—you must prepare yourself for a cross-examination. After what has happened, I feel that I am entitled, that I have acquired a sort of right, to ask you to break your silence concerning her husband and her marriage.

"I come to town to-morrow in his company. He swears he will make my fortune for me. I may count him from this time forward as my certain friend and ally, he says. Isn't it funny? But the fun is surely of a ghastly sardonic kind. He wants me to come and stay at his house in town. I have had the greatest difficulty in begging off. I am engaged forthwith to paint his portrait and his wife's! I can't very well tell him that once upon a time I was her favored suitor, can I?

"Oh, Armidis, it has somehow all gone straight to my sore place. You see how incoherent it has rendered me. I have to laugh a little at it, lest I should do something mad. But I should like to go to sleep to-night and never wake. What is the use—to live with death in the soul?

"I don't know but I have forgotten to tell you that she is in town. I am, according to Léonticheff, to be presented to her as soon as I return—to-morrow even. What had I better do? I don't see how I can get out of it. Perhaps I had best turn tail and fly to the Continent? And yet this chance of seeing her, of speaking with her, of hearing her speak, of drinking in her beauty for a moment, of feeling myself in her presence, and breathing the same air that she breathes—oh, I cannot let it pass! It would be like bread to a starving man. Just to let my eyes rest with hers for one minute! It would renew my life, and give me strength to go on with. What harm could possibly come of it? And yet, I dread it, I dread it. For if she cares for him, and thanks me in good earnest, her thanks will scald me. And if she hates him, she will want to curse me, and I will curse myself. This much I will say to you in a whisper: if I had known beforehand who the man was, I am afraid I never should have hired that tug. That's beastly, I know; but I can't help it.

"Au revoir till to-morrow.—J. N."

PART VI.

DESPERATE APPLIANCE.

I.

"And now," concluded Prince Léonticheff—it was the afternoon of the next day, and he had just given me his version of the affair: a version eloquent of praise and gratitude for his deliverer—"and now he is downstairs, in the library, waiting to be presented to you. And I shall expect you—whatever your private feelings may be, and I dare say you wish he had been a thousand miles away at the time—I shall expect you to receive him graciously, and to thank him for saving your husband's life. I will have no sulking on this occasion; let that be understood. I am going down to him now, and you will be good enough to follow in the course of a few minutes."

"Yes," I responded, "I will come at once. But first . . ."

I felt so weak and nervous, my heart was fluttering so, my thoughts were in such confusion, I had to pause and close my eyes, and rest for a moment, before I could go on. A sleepless night, a long day crowded with emotions, had quite unstrung me; and now that the actual hour had come, and I knew that Julian in living person was waiting to meet me twenty steps away, and that in another minute or two I should be standing in his presence—now the last atom of my strength seemed to slip from me, leaving me so prostrated, so exhausted, that I could neither move nor speak. I closed my eyes, and was silent for a little. Then at last I gathered force enough to continue. "But first I think I ought to tell you that this Mr. North . . ."

I looked up to where Prince Léonticheff had been standing. He was gone. I suppose he had left the room at the end of his own speech, without waiting to to hear my reply. . . .

By and by, with throbbing pulses, and tremulous breath, I started to follow him. . . . I descended the staircase, and advanced toward the library—where Julian was waiting for me!—Julian was waiting for me! Oh, the joy, and the strange pain and fear! How should I greet him? How would he greet me? What would pass between us? I did not know. I could not think. My brain was whirling, all my faculties were as if frozen, my very body seemed numb and dead.

A servant threw open the library door. I entered the room.

But I could do no more than just cross the threshold. There I had to stand still, and put out my hand, and lean against a console for support: so faint and weak that otherwise, I believe, I should have sunken to the floor.

He was seated on a sofa, beneath one of the great windows, opposite me. From the instant of the door's opening I saw him there, I could see nothing else. But to my dizzy senses, the distance between us seemed immeasurable; it was as if I looked at him across leagues and leagues of space.

At my entrance I saw him rise, turning his face toward me. It was white like chalk; and his lips were contracted in an awful simulacrum of a smile. He fixed his eyes upon me; they glowed with an intense hungry fire that seemed to burn me, so that, by a movement altogether instinctive and spasmodic, I put up my hands, and covered my breast, as if to protect it.

"This is Mr. North," the Prince began—the sound of his voice startled me: I had forgotten that he was there

—"Mr. North, who yesterday, as I have told you, saved my life at the very imminent peril of his own. Whoever is my friend must be his equally. Whoever wishes for my good-will must do him honor."

The room had grown dim and gray to my sight; and a chill and sickness had come upon me, like those that precede a fainting-fit. All I could see of Julian was a vague black figure, unsubstantial and wavering, far, far in the distance, and a patch of whiteness where his face had been. The thought that I was going to faint, and so make a scene, acted as a spur upon me, and gave me a sort of desperate energy. I dare say it was with every sign of self-possession that I answered the Prince, "We did not need to be introduced, Mr. North and I. We knew each other long ago in Paris. You have often heard of him. Do you not remember?"

"What!" cried the Prince, looking amazement from one to the other of us. . . .

So he stood for a moment, nonplussed.

"You mean to say . . . ?" he began at last addressing me.

He read his answer, I suppose, in my face.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he ejaculated, with a laugh. Whereat he went up to Julian, and slapped him on the shoulder, saying with all good nature, "Well, my boy, here's a go. Hey? So you—you're the young American painter! It's the strangest coincidence I ever heard of in my life. And how mum you kept about it! But I say, look here, did you know who I was? That is, that I was her husband?"

"No. All I knew was that a man was clinging to the buoy," Julian answered.

It was the first time I had heard his voice since he had bidden me good-by in Paris, six years ago.

"No, no, I mean after we were aboard the tug," explained the Prince. "After I had told you my name. Did you know that I was the man she had married?"

"Oh, yes; I knew that," Julian said.

"Well, it's all right, anyhow," returned the Prince, complaisantly. "It's all right, my boy. Don't let it disturb you the least bit in the world. The past is past, and I'm not jealous of it. There's nothing small about me, and I shan't begrudge you—the man who saved my life—I shan't begrudge you my wife's friendship, even if you were, in days gone by, her lover. Sit down. We'll be quite a little family party. . . . And I say," he inquired of me, "can't we have some tea?"

I rang for a servant; and he went on. . . .

"No, my friend, don't let it disturb you. If it was going to disturb anybody, you say, it ought to disturb me; but it doesn't, not in the least. You see, I'm so confident of the affections of my wife. I know all about the little fancy you and she had for each other years ago; she's told me all about it, and laughed over it with me. Oh, that sort of thing happens to everyone at a certain age; but it doesn't count, it doesn't leave any mark. On the contrary, it exercises the faculties, it paves the way for a really serious passion. Monica loves me now with such whole-souled devotion, I'd be a fool to let the past bother me. I've always been an attractive man for women; and she fairly dotes on me; she can't bear me out of her sight. But it's a wonderful coincidence all the same, isn't it? Ho-ho-ho!" he laughed.

Julian turned away, and looked out of the window. I wondered whether he believed what the Prince said. Or did he understand that it was simply a lie, manufactured on the spot, for the purpose of hoodwinking him, relieving the Prince's embarrassment, and thrusting a thorn into me? Had he seen Armidis? If so, he knew by this time just what the relations were between my husband

and myself. But if he had not seen Armidis, what was there to prevent him believing anything and everything the Prince might say?

The Prince was looking hard at me, smiling in enjoyment of his advantage and my helplessness.

A servant came in with the tea.

"Now, my darling," the Prince said, "let us have our tea. Come, North; tea, tea! Will you take yours with cream and sugar, or with rum and a bit of lemon? Better try the rum and lemon. Are there any cigarettes here, dearest?"

The situation was unbearable. There was nothing I could say, there was but one thing I could do, to relieve it. I got up hastily, and made for the door, to leave the room.

But the Prince stepped in front of me. . . .

"Where are you going, my love? To fetch some cigarettes? Oh, don't trouble to do that. Send some one. Come, you haven't spoken to your old friend yet, or shaken hands with him."

He put his arm around my waist, and drew me back into the room.

That was the last straw. . . . At his touch, all my hatred of him, all my scorn of him, all the rancorous ill-feeling for him that smoldered in my heart, all the angry pain that he had been kindling there during this interview, blazed up in an uncontrollable fire. At his touch . . . ! Oh, I could have killed him!

I felt myself suddenly grow cold and rigid; then suddenly the cold changed to heat, a fierce heat that went burning through all my veins. Then I heard the Prince say, unctuously, coaxingly, "Come; you surely must have something to say to Mr. North," and he gave my waist a little pressure. Then . . .

Somehow, by a quick, violent movement, I managed to free myself from his embrace, and trembling with rage, I cried, "How dare you touch me!" Then, mechanically—for my instinct to leave the room was still upon me—I tried again to reach the door. But again the Prince placed himself before me. His face had turned purple, and his little eyes shone upon me with their wickedest, most menacing light.

I thought he was going to strike me. In another minute I believe he would have done so. For a second I stood still, facing him, hesitating, trying to think of some way to escape him. . . .

He took a step toward me. . . .

"Julian!" I called. . . .

And then, somehow, I found myself at his side, and had his hand in mine! I looked at the Prince, and I cried out, "Julian, don't let him touch me!" . . . And all at once there came to me, in a great wave, a feeling that I had never known before. I stood at Julian's side, and I clung to his hands, warm and strong in mine, and I realized, with a mighty swelling of the heart, I realized *that I was safe!* that now, at last, for the first time since my marriage, I was safe, absolutely secure and safe! My enemy was at bay! There was no harm he could do me now, no insult he could offer me. Julian was here, beside me, holding my hands, giving me strength and courage. For the first time in the course of our lives together, I met the Prince on something like equal terms. I felt as if clad in armor, and surrounded by an invincible bodyguard. I looked across the room at him, scowling threats upon me, and now somehow more repulsive, more mean and evil, in my sight than he had ever been before; I looked at him, and my passion mounted, and possessed me, and carried me away. . . .

"Julian!" I cried, still trembling, in spite of my great joyous sense of safety. "Oh, you will not let him touch me! Look at him. He wishes me to speak to you. He brought me down here to thank you for having saved his life! To thank you for it! For having risked your life, to save his! And then, when he found out who you were, then he began to mock me, and torture me, in your presence, telling you that I loved him, and that I had laughed with him over my love for you. He thought I would not dare to answer him, to contradict him, and he gloated in the anguish he knew he was causing me, and in my helplessness. And then he would not let me go away, but kept me here, and wanted to know if I had nothing to say to you. And then when he touched me, and I could not control myself any longer, and could not help showing my fear of him and my loathing of him, then he became furious; and now, now he would strike me, he would knock me down, and kick me, and spit upon me, only you are here, and he doesn't dare, he doesn't dare! . . . You think I must have something to say to Mr. North! Do you know who he is? Do you know what he was? Oh he was my lover—my lover, my lover!" I repeated. "Do you understand? And now I see him for the first time, after so many years, and so much suffering! Oh, I have much to say to him, a great many things to say to him; things that I have never been able to say to anyone before, that I never *could* have said to anyone but him, and not even to him, except for what has happened these last two days. But he has saved your life, he has saved you from drowning, and that gives him a peculiar relation to you and me. I think he has a right to know the sort of life that he has saved, and how his saving it will affect *me*, how it will affect *my* life. I am going to tell him. . . . You, you cannot stop me. You will not dare to touch me, and I can speak without fear of you. If you so much as raised your finger against me, he would kill you—yes, he would kill you!"

Oh, the wild joy! To let this lava-flood of passion, long pent under, long accumulating, and burning and festering in my heart, to let it at last and all at once break forth! To stand there protected by the man who loved me, the man I loved, and pour it out fearlessly upon the head of the man I hated!

"Julian," I hurried on, "yesterday I was at your house, with Armidis. I was there with him when he received your letter; and I read it with him, he let me read it with him. . . . Look, Julian! You have saved this man's life. At the risk of your own, you have saved his life. That gives you a peculiar position toward him and toward me. The life you saved—you have a right to know it, to know what it is like, to know what you have done. Oh, I don't blame you, I don't reproach you; but you would never have done it, if you had known beforehand. I will tell you now; I will tell you the truth about it. I have never told anyone before; I have kept it all a secret. But now I will tell you. He would like to stop me, but he cannot, he doesn't dare, because you are here. Oh, thank God that you are here! For this hour at any rate I need not fear him. It makes me feel so safe, so strong and fearless to have you here. Look at him. Either he must go away, and leave us together, and let me tell you what I have to tell, alone; or he must stay here, and not move or speak, and listen. Julian, do you know how I came to marry him? You said in your letter you thought it was forced upon me. Oh, forced upon me! Listen. He had it in his power to procure a pardon for my father from the Emperor of Russia, so that he could return to his own country, and to his estates, and to all his rights. But he said he would not exercise this power, unless he was paid! He said he would exercise it only on one condition, for one price: I must marry him! He would not lift his finger to help my father, unless he was paid; and I was the price he asked! And at last, after long resistance, I was tired out, and I was ill, and I was a fool, and I married him. It seemed as if there was nothing else for me to do, and so I married him. But then, having bought me in that way, he expected me to love him! *Love* him! love *him!* Oh, Julian! And because I could not love him, because by his very nature he was hateful and loathsome to me, he became furious with me, and he struck me, and he spat in my face. And after that, because I still could not love him, he made it a practice to strike me, to spit upon me, to insult me, whenever he was displeased. Then I asked him to let me leave him, to let me go away from him, to let me go to my father. But no, he wouldn't. He would not let me go, and he said if I tried to go in spite of him, he would have my father arrested and sent to the mines in Siberia! So that I have had to go on living with him, for four years I have been compelled to live with him; and there is no deliverance possible for me, except in death—his death or mine. But oh, Julian, his beating me is nothing. If you could hear him talk to me! If you could hear the kind of talk he delights in in my presence, to shame me and humiliate me and disgust me! He brings his mistresses to stay in this house; he sets his sycophants on to make love to me: and then before them he says things to me . . . ! Oh, imagine, imagine! And I have had to bear it all, because he holds my father as a hostage. Would you have gone out in the storm, would you have risked your life, would you have saved him, if you had known? Oh, see what you have done, what you have condemned me to! Oh, if you had only known! If you could only have let him drown?"

The Prince stood across the room, trying to laugh. As I paused, he raised his arm, and pointed to the door, and said to me, "Get out of this room. Hold your jaw, and get out of the room."

I felt Julian's fingers tighten convulsively upon mine. Then he turned to the Prince, and nodding his head at him in a way that was not to be misunderstood, he said, very low, very slowly, with the drawl that was his habit, and with an inflexion that gave his speech the value of a thousand threats, "I will thank you, in addressing this lady, to be a little more choice of your language."

"Look here, North," the Prince expostulated, "I don't want to quarrel with you."

"I am afraid you will have no alternative," Julian answered.

"Oh, I say! You don't mean to tell me that you are going to swallow the lies of that she-devil," the Prince cried.

"I must really trouble you to guard your tongue," Julian said.

To me, by this time, had come the inevitable reaction. Exhaustion and depression had followed my excitement, and I had sunken upon a chair, where I sat in a state of complete nervous and physical collapse.

The Prince for a moment seemed to hesitate, uncertain what to do or say. Presently . . .

"I'm under great obligations to you, North," he began, "and that puts me at a disadvantage. I think, if you will fancy yourself in my place, you will grant in common fairness that I am at a disadvantage."

"Well . . . ? And then . . . ?" returned Julian, shortly.

"Well, I don't want to quarrel with you, that's all. If any other living man stood in your shoes at this moment, it would be bad for him. If any other man had been a witness of this scene to-day, I don't think he'd live long to tell of it. But with you it's different. I can't forget what happened the day before yesterday; I can't forget the debt I owe you; and that puts me at a serious disadvantage. It puts me at a disadvantage, and it renders you comparatively speaking safe. Now, I don't think you're a coward, and no one but a coward would profit by a situation like this. My hands, so to speak, are tied. Therefore, I say to you, don't exasperate me. Of course, if you drive me to it, I shall have to quarrel with you, whether I will or no."

"Yes, I think you will have to," said Julian.

"Well, it will be your fault if I do," said the Prince. "But first I want to know if you can listen to reason for a moment. Of course I am prejudiced in your eyes beforehand. When a man is arraigned before another man by a woman, and especially by a woman whom the other man has been in love with, his case is prejudiced beforehand. All the same I'll appeal to your common sense and your sense of fair play, to your knowledge of the world and of human nature, not to swallow quite as gospel the ravings of a woman in hysterics. My wife and I have had our differences, that I'll admit at once; we have had our differences, just as all married couples on the face of this planet have their differences from time to time; but to-day she lost her head, and she exaggerated, and she said things without appreciating their meaning or their gravity, and without reckoning their effect. She said things in such a way as to throw an entirely false light upon them; I dare say, in her excitement, she saw them in an entirely false light, and didn't purposely distort the truth. But I can assure you of this, she will be the first to regret what she has said to-day when she comes to her senses to-morrow. All this business—my narrow escape from drowning, your rescuing me, and then her meeting with you under these peculiar circumstances after so many years of separation—all this has wrought upon her nerves, and unhinged her, and sent her into hysterics. Now don't tell me that you're going to take seriously and literally what a woman says when she is in hysterics. She's just as far out of her right mind as if she were lying in delirium on a fever bed. And don't we all know that when a person is delirious he always says the very opposite of what he would say in his right mind? He reviles the people he loves, he conceives a passion for those he hates. The whole world is turned wrong-end-foremost in his brain; and no one thinks of giving the slightest weight to what he says. Well, it's just the same when a woman's hysterical. Monica and I have had our differences, but on the whole we're a singularly happy and a singularly affectionate couple, as she will tell you with her own lips when she is herself again—to-morrow, say. I just want to ask you whether it's probable that, if I were really anything like the monster she's been describing, is it probable that she would have let herself go as she has to-day? Wouldn't she have been afraid? Afraid of my making it infernally disagreeable for her afterwards? If I were really in the habit of beating her and spitting on her and abusing her generally, as she pretends, or if she had thought that there was the remotest danger of my doing anything of that sort, don't you think she would have made a little effort to hold herself in? What would the brute that she has painted do as soon as you had gone, and he and she were alone together? Hey? Do you see what I mean? Now, don't misunderstand me; I'm not blaming her. I excuse her and forgive her on the ground that she had lost her head, and was irresponsible, and didn't in the least realize what she said. To-morrow she'll regret it all from the bottom of her heart; she'll send for you, and she'll contradict every word that she has spoken to-day. All I ask of you is that you'll suspend your judgment in the affair till then—till you have seen her again, and heard her speak in her sober senses. There; now I don't want to seem inhospitable; but you had better go away now, and leave her to me."

"Leave her to you!" Julian echoed, in a sort of gasp. "To you . . . !"

Then he turned to me, and said, "Monica, you must let me take you away from here. You must come with me. I will take you somewhere where you will be safe. Then I will settle with him afterward."

"Really, North, I put it to you as a man of the world, aren't you going a little to far? To ask my wife to elope with you under my very nose!" said the Prince.

"Of course, Monica, you know I mean nothing of that kind," said Julian. "But I can't go away and leave you here. You must come with me. I must know that you are safe from him, before I can do anything else."

"I don't think, Monica," said the Prince, "that you will be unwise enough to accept Mr. North's invitation. Already, if you have recovered yourself a little, you will have begun to repent your behavior during the last half hour, and to consider its possible consequences. I wouldn't go any further, if I were you. You would only store up more matter still for regret to-morrow. I think you had better leave us now, and retire to your own rooms. I honestly think you had better. The situation is becoming slightly strained. By leaving us you will do much to relax it."

Indeed, he was right. Already I had begun to repent. Already every other sentiment had disappeared before a growing terror of the possible consequences of what I had done. I had given way to an uncontrollable impulse; I had leapt without looking. Now, when it was too late, after the fact, I began to look. I was appalled by what I saw. The Prince was not the man to eschew reprisals.

What form would his reprisals take? . . . In the extremity of my fear, I had lost all power to think; but to my imagination his revenge presented itself like a storm-cloud, formless but black and vast, looming up on my horizon. And a sort of instinct told me that now docility and obedience would be the better part of valor.

"Yes," I said to myself, "I had better do as he bids me, and go upstairs."

And I rose from my chair to do so. But then suddenly a new fear came upon me. If I should leave those two men alone there together . . ! What might not happen?

"Julian," I said, "please go away."

He did not speak, but his eyes covered me with questions and appeals.

"Yes," I answered, "I mean it. Please go. You need not be afraid. It is the only way you can help me. I cannot go with you. You will do no good by staying. You will only make it harder for me if you do."

The Prince rang for a servant. "I will drop you a line, telling you when to come again, North," he said.

The servant entered, and the Prince bade him show Mr. North to the door.

Julian looked at me.

"Yes," I said, "go, go."

And then he was gone. . . .

Now—what would my husband do to me? Would he kill me? I stood shrinking and trembling across the room from him.

"I am dining at the club to-night," he said, in his most matter-of-fact accents, "and so I shan't see you again until to-morrow. Meanwhile you may think over the mess you've made this afternoon, and consider how to straighten it out. I don't care how you do it, but somehow you've got to convince our friend North that there wasn't a word of truth in all you said. The end is the only thing that concerns me; the ways and means are your affair. I give you twenty-four hours. I shall write to North to call at this time to-morrow. *Au plaisir de vous revoir.*"

He made a profound bow, and opened the door for me to pass.

II.

I GOT up early next morning, and threw open my window, and leaned out for a breath of air. It was a pale gray day. The sky was completely overcast with leaden, low-hanging clouds. The atmosphere was dim with a fine bluish mist. And though it was not raining now, I could see from the water in the street that it had been doing so during the night. The Park stretched away in front of me, dark green and distinct in the foreground, but ashen and blurred by the mist in the distance; and it sent forth from its wet turf and dripping trees a crowd of racy penetrating odors. My head ached, and every nerve in my body seemed to be on edge, and in my breast, like a weight, there lay a dull feeling of depression and of apprehension; and the sight of the cool shadowy Park, and the smell of it, tempted me, so that I thought, "I will go out and walk there. It will soothe me and refresh me."

I entered by the gate opposite Salchester House, and struck straight across the wet greensward, in the direction of Kensington Gardens. The air was exquisitely keen and sweet; it was intensely quiet, save for the rustling of the leaves in the breeze and the occasional piping of a bird; and with the exception of a desultory keeper or two, the place appeared deserted.

But in a few minutes I became aware of the rapid rhythm of footsteps behind me; and mechanically I glanced around. . . . A man was advancing toward me. . . . It took a second for me to recognize him. . . .

"Julian!" I seemed to cry out; but I spoke the word only in imagination; no sound escaped my lips.

I stood still, and waited for him to overtake me.

"I've been hanging around your house for the last hour or two," he explained quietly. "I couldn't keep away. But I never hoped to see you. I was seated on one of the benches below there, when a woman passed at a distance. I must have been in a brown study, or something; for it didn't strike me till a minute ago who she was."

I could not speak, I could hardly breathe, for the turbulent rush and throb of the blood in my veins. We walked on, side by side, in silence. He carried a stick in his hand, and kept whipping the grass with it.

"Oh, it's hellish!" he cried out all at once, bringing his stick down with violence. "The devil himself must have plotted it. Wasn't it bad enough and hard enough already? Good God! And if they couldn't leave him there, and let him drown, and go to Hell in his own way, why did they need to choose me—me!—to step in and pull him out? I wish I had the chance again."

Still I could not speak. We continued to walk on in silence.

By and by, "Oh, to think, to think!" he groaned. "Your incubus was slipping from you; in another minute you would have been free; and then I—I—had to come up and fasten him on again! Was there ever such a devilish mischance? Merciful God! To have such a thing to remember! Oh, how you must hate me!"

"No, no; I don't hate you. Don't think that; you mustn't think that. You couldn't help it. How could you know?"

"Oh, if I'd known!" he cried. . . .

Then, after a minute, with sudden fierceness, "If I'd known—by God, I'd have gone out there just to watch him drown!"

Presently, "Well," he went on, with a short, bitter laugh, "you have a lot to thank me for. I've been your mascot from the beginning, haven't I? You see, I've had a talk with Armidis; and I know all about it now. Yes, you have a lot to thank me for—all the misery that has ever come into your life, in short. And yet you used to say, we used to think, that it was God who had brought us together! And now this, this caps the climax, crowns the good work, paints the lily! Oh, no, I didn't know. All I knew was that a man was hanging on to that buoy for dear life. I'm vain of my prowess as a swimmer, and I thought to gain a feather for my cap by going to his rescue. My motive was a low one from the outset; I see that now—vainglory. Perhaps that's why the Lord has punished me so."

After a while he said, "Do you see how beautiful the effect is, as you look off across the grass, between the trees, and the distance gradually melts and merges into the haze? That's one of the loveliest things in London; and it's London's own; you never find it elsewhere. Whenever I see a beautiful thing, there comes a great aching, a sort of hunger, in my heart; and I think, 'Oh, if she were here, if she were here!' It's like fuel added to the fire. Thousands of times, as I've walked here in the Park, and all this beauty has poured in upon me, that longing for you to share it with me has come over me, and I have thought, 'Oh, my cup would run over if she were here!' . . . Well, the dream has come true; the dream that I always held to be impossible has come true; and here you are! Here we are together! But, oh—the difference! Even in nightmares I never dreamed anything so horrible as this. That I should be to blame for the . . . the . . . well, then . . . the perpetuation of your sorrows!"

"You are not to blame for it. Nobody is to blame. It is a part of the inevitable order. What you did was noble and heroic. You could not have done otherwise."

"Oh, if my *motive* had been noble or heroic! But I haven't even that small satisfaction. I fooled myself at the time with the notion that my motive was an unselfish desire to save a poor devil from drowning. I see now that my motive was nothing more or less than a desire to glorify myself, and figure in an heroic attitude. Vanity pure and simple. That's God's truth about my motive."

"Oh, well, what does it matter? What does it matter?" I cried. "It can't be helped now."

"Tell me this," he said abruptly. "What did he . . . what did he do after I had gone . . . yesterday? Did he . . . ?"

"No," I answered. "He did nothing. He told me that I must see you again to-day, and persuade you not to believe what I had said. He has written you to come again this afternoon."

"You will have hard work to persuade me," said Julian, with a grim little laugh.

"Oh, of course, of course. I ought not to have told you; above all not before him. I ought never to have spoken as I did. It put me in the wrong. But I was beside myself. I couldn't help it. And now—now that it is done, and you know it all, I don't see why I should try to make you think it was false. I have not seen him since."

"Well, then, you have seen the last of him, thank heaven!"

"The last of him?" I echoed, puzzled, alarmed a little.

"You never shall see him again—never. You shall never return to his house."

"Ah, but that's the worst of it. I must."

"Must! But I say you shan't. I won't allow it. It was bad enough to know that you were married to him;

but I could bear that. I could bear it because I didn't know the rest, and I had no reason to suppose you were unhappy with him. But now! Now that I do know, know it all! What do you think I am made of? I never can let you live with him again, and I never will. It is impossible."

"There is nothing else for me to do."

"No, no, I won't allow you to return to him," he went on, not heeding what I had said. "Never, never! I don't ask you to come to me. I can't invite you to that sort of life. It would be as wretched for you in its way as this. But I will put you somewhere where you will be safe from him. You don't suppose I can stand still and let you go back to a man who beats you! Beats you! Monica! Beats you, and spits on you, and insults you! And I away from you, so that I can't shield you, so that I can't strangle him! Merciful heavens!"

He took my hand, and for a moment we stood together, hand in hand.

"You are trembling," I said. "What is it?"

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know. It is everything. It is because I love you so; because I have never ceased to love you, and to hunger for you, and to dream of seeing you again; and now here you are! It makes my heart leap, it makes me tremble. But oh, the horror of it, the horror!"

"Oh, you love me!" I cried.

"Yes, yes, yes! I love you. Oh, God knows I love you. If I could take you in my arms now, and crush you there, and die with you! Oh, yes, I love you! If I didn't love you it wouldn't matter. It's the love that makes it hideous. Oh, put yourself in my place. It is just as terrible for me as it is for you. Fancy! To know that you live in constant peril of being outraged by him, beaten by him—you, so frail and beautiful and defenceless—you, whom I love! Oh, Monica! Imagine the hell I have been in ever since I left you yesterday, left you to him, alone to his tender mercies! Why did I do it? Why did I go away? How did I ever come to do it? To go away, and leave you alone with him, with nobody to protect you from him? Oh, I was mad, I was out of my senses; and you commanded me, and I could not disobey you then. You said it would make it harder for you if I stayed; and my wits seemed frozen up, and I did as you bade me. But now . . . ! Now that I have you here, hold you here! Do you think I will let you go? You have chosen to bear it, to put up with it, in silence. But I tell you that I *won't* bear it. Do you hear? There's a limit, a limit! You never shall go back. To expose yourself to his foulness and his brutality again!"

"But you don't realize, you don't reflect. I never would go back to him—I should have left him years ago—only, as I told you, he would wreak his vengeance upon my father. His influence in Russia is boundless. He would have my father thrown into jail, sent to Siberia, I don't know what. He could do anything he liked."

"That's an empty threat; brag, bluster."

"I'm afraid it isn't. At all events, I don't dare, I have no right, to put it to the test. The mere possibility is too appalling."

"I don't see that it is any more appalling than this actual condition of affairs. And, anyhow, it only is a possibility, whereas this is a terribly certain fact. Besides, talk of right! Why, if anybody's got to suffer, why shouldn't it be your father? Why shouldn't it be he as well as you? Rather than you, by Jove! He made this marriage, didn't he? It was his doing, wasn't it? He was the one who desired it, who forced you into it. Well, now, let him pay the penalty of it, and bear the brunt of it. He sowed the wind; let him reap the whirlwind. You are miserable, in order that he may be happy. I can't see that his happiness is of any greater importance than yours. One human being is as good as another. That's justice and common sense."

"No, no, it is sophistry. You have learned it from Armidis. You ought to know me well enough, you ought to know human nature well enough, to understand that I would only be more unhappy still if I tried to purchase liberty for myself at the cost of my father's. What peace would there be for me?"

"Why don't you get your father out of Russia? Out of the reach of danger? Write to him to make a journey to Paris. Then . . . you can join him there, and Léonticheff may whistle."

"Ah, but the Prince has him watched constantly. At the first move he made to leave the country he would be arrested."

"Bah! Such things happen only in melodramas. I don't believe it. Do you?"

"Yes. Prince Léonticheff is melodramatic. At least, I believe it enough to refrain from trying experiments. Russia is not like other countries. A man may be arrested and shut up in prison, in solitary confinement, without his friends knowing where he is, for years and years—until he dies or loses his reason, perhaps—on mere suspicion. It is like the days of the Bastille. You simply disappear, that is all. And a word from Prince Léonticheff in Russia would be as fatal as a conviction by a jury in England."

"But he wouldn't speak the word. After all, why should he?"

"Oh, his motives would be complex. Partly for pure malice, partly to give me tit for tat. But I cannot undertake to analyze his motives."

"Well, he may try it. He may do his worst. You don't go back to him, you shan't. No, not if I have to prevent you by main force. You talk of right. Well, you have a right to your life, haven't you? *I* have a right to it, by heaven! I shan't let you forswear it any longer. No, no!"

"Oh, what is the use of saying things like that? I have got to go back to him. I can't even think of not doing so. I've got to go back to him, and live with him. I have no choice or option in the matter. I can't sacrifice my father. So long as my father is alive, there can be no escape for me!"

"Unless . . . unless . . . well, then, unless the Prince should be inspired to drop off first."

"Yes. But he won't."

"I don't know. He came mighty near it the day before yesterday. There wasn't more than an hour left in him when we hauled him aboard that tug. If it hadn't been for my infernal meddling . . .! Why, damn him, I own the man! His life is my property. If I killed him, it wouldn't be murder. It would only be putting him back where he was before I interfered."

Julian stopped short in his walk, and looked at me. His face was white, and very hard and set. His eyes shone with a light that somehow made me shiver.

"If I should kill him . . .?" he repeated very low. "Eh? Suppose I should kill him?"

I stood trembling, with my eyes averted from his.

"I should be well within my rights," he said. "I should simply be undoing what I myself have done. Repairing the mischief!"

He paused for a few seconds. Then . . .

"Do you wish me to kill him? You have only to speak the word. It wouldn't be murder. It would be giving the devil his due—which I cheated him of the other day.

Murder! Why, it would be pig-sticking! It would be like shooting a mad dog. Isn't a man justified in killing a beast that's attacking a woman? The woman he loves!"

I had grown cold from head to foot; and there was something aching in my throat, that felt like a lump of ice. Every word he spoke seemed to pierce me through and through, and to set all the quick quivering. . . . "Don't, don't," I gasped faintly. "I can't bear it."

"Don't what?" he questioned, with a harsh laugh. "Don't kill him? Or don't talk about it? Why, it would be a deed of atonement, of expiation, of penance. It's the only way open to me to retrieve the wrong I've done you. If you would leave him, if you could leave him, it would be different, it wouldn't be necessary. But if you won't leave him, if you can't leave him, if he refuses to let you leave him, and compels you by force to go on living with him—why, it's his own responsibility. If I can escape without killing my jailer, so much the better for him. But if he places himself before me, his blood will be upon his own head, since escape I must and will, *coûte que coûte*. . . . But there! In all seriousness, in all conscience, I believe it would be right. I believe it's the only right thing to do. Come! Let us brush aside shams and conventionalities, and face the truth, God's truth. We have come to a pass in life where the ordinary formulas of the world won't help us. They give way beneath us like the hollow shells they are. Our position is a great, a terrible reality: we must fall back upon realities, in order to cope with it. We've got to let go the formulas of the world, and return to nature. Let us be frank and honest and unsparing. Now tell me, tell me in one word, don't you wish he was dead? Wouldn't you be glad, wouldn't it be like news of emancipation to you, if you knew that he was dead?"

"Oh, for that! Yes, I wish that he was dead. I can't see that he does good to any human being by living. Oh, yes, I should be glad to know that he was dead."

"And now tell me this other thing; tell me in what manner, in what degree, it would be wrong, or criminal, or sinful, or anything but holy and righteous for me to kill him? . . . for me to put him out of existence? Look! He's a curse to you, he's a curse to me, he's a curse to your father, he's a curse to every living thing that comes near him. He poisons the air around him. He's a blemish, he's a danger, on the face of the earth, like the dragons, the ogres, of our childhood. Why would there be any more harm in removing him, than in removing any other mass of evil and corruption? Why, it would be to abate a public nuisance. If you should do it with your own hand, it would be a clear case of self-defence. Isn't it the same thing if you do it by proxy? If I do it for you? Besides, it's my fault that he's alive at all. I dragged him out of the jaws of death, and now he belongs to me. I should only be disposing of my own if I made away with him. And then . . . with him once for all out of God's world! Oh, Monica! It would be ours! Ours, Monica! We could begin to live! We could go back to the life and the joy that we've lost, that he has robbed us of."

"Oh, don't, don't," I entreated him. "What is the use of talking like that? It is so impossible. You won't kill him, you can't kill him. Yes, I wish he was dead; but you cannot kill him. What is the use of talking of impossibilities? We may as well make up our minds to bear it. We've borne it four years, five years, already. We can bear it a few years longer, more or less. And after we are dead what will be the difference? I suppose there is some reason for it, some purpose in it; there must be. No, no, we must part from each other again, and go back to our separate lives. You to your work, your painting; you will paint great pictures. And I . . . I to Prince Léonticheff, and I will try to wait in patience for the end. The best thing of all would be for me to die. I should have taken poison a thousand times, only I don't dare, I am too great a coward. We will try to forget these last two days, and take up our lives again just where they were before it all happened."

"Oh, if you speak of impossibilities, there is one. That is against the whole scheme of nature. As if events could be without consequences! As if we could shape our future in imitation of the past, without regard to the facts, the causes, that come to alter it. This thing has been done; it can't be undone; it's a seed that has been planted: it can't fail to take root and bear fruit, bitter or sweet. We're not ostriches; we can't stick our heads in the sand, and ignore it. You might as well try to ignore it if your house were afire. And as for forgetting! Can I forget that but for my cursed interference you to-day would be free? Why, it's the only thing I can remember. It fills my whole brain, and burns in every drop of my blood. You see . . . you see . . . well, then, you see . . . I love you."

"Oh, if you had only never known me, never seen me!" I cried.

"It would have been better for you, yes. For me, oh, Monica! I prefer this hell to any heaven without you."

We were in Kensington Gardens, near the palace.

"I am going home now," I said. "You may put me in a hansom."

"Home!" he echoed. "Then you haven't heard me? I have told you that you never shall go back to that house, and I mean it. Somehow this matter has got to be arranged so that you will never pass another hour alone under the same roof with him. I could no more stand still here and allow you to go back there, than I could stand still and let you walk out under the hoofs of those horses in the street. Why, think of it! At any moment he might insult you, he might strike you! How can I live, and know that you are alone there with him, exposed to such danger? Fire would be nothing to it. No, you shan't go back."

"But there is nothing else to do. Nothing else is possible, practicable."

"Yes, there is. There is this. I have got a plan. Listen to me. I will go to him. I will go and have a talk with him. He's under a certain obligation to me, and in common decency he will have to give me a hearing. I will go and have a talk with him, and I will bring him to reason. I will persuade him to consent to a separation. I will show him that it is folly of the worst kind on his part to force you to live with him, and he will consent to a separation. Between arguments and threats I will guarantee to bring him round."

"Arguments and threats! You might as well address them to a statue."

"Well, let me try. There's no harm trying. It's a chance. Surely the end is worth it."

"No, no. I should be afraid—afraid to leave you and him alone together."

"Afraid? Afraid of what, for heaven's sake? What do you fear would happen?"

"Oh, I don't know. He—he might kill you."

"I don't think you need be afraid of *that*," he said, with a strange laugh.

Then, after a little pause, "See here," he began. "You know Miss Wynn, don't you? Wasn't it at her house that you met Armidis the other day?"

"Yes."

"Well, now, listen. This is what I want you to do.

Let me take you to Miss Wynn's. She lives within five minutes' walk of here. Let me leave you there, with her, while I go to see Léonticheff. Then I will come back and tell you the result of our interview. That is not asking very much, Monica; do you think it is? Only that you will stay with Clotilde Wynn for an hour or so, while I see your husband. She's a good woman, she's kind and honest."

"Oh, no, I can't do that. I have no right to involve her in my affairs. Especially not in my troubles with Prince Léonticheff. If it should ever come to an open scandal, or anything. . . . Don't you understand?"

"Well, then, where can I leave you? Where can you wait while I am away?"

"Oh, nowhere, nowhere. It's utterly useless. I have got to go back, I have got to, Julian. There is no use in your seeing the Prince. No good can come of it. You never can persuade him to anything. What's the use of rebelling against a thing that can't be helped? It only makes it harder."

"Well, I am going to see him anyhow, use or no use. All I ask is where will you wait for me meanwhile."

"I will wait at home, I will wait at Salchester House, if you insist upon seeing him."

We turned out of the gardens into Kensington High Street, and I said, "Please call a hansom for me."

"Well," he said, with a shrug of the shoulders, "you are determined. But so am I. You will go back to Salchester House; and I will seek an interview with Léonticheff. Then I shall know where to find you when I am ready to report. Meanwhile. . . . Can't you lock yourself up in your room?"

"Oh, there is nothing to be feared meanwhile. He won't molest me in any way till this afternoon, when he will expect me to see you, you know. But your interview with him . . . It will be a failure. I can assure you of that beforehand."

"Never mind, never mind. Where there's a will there's a way, and you needn't have any doubt of the will in my case. If my interview with him should prove a failure, why, then, I'll have to try something else. But I will give him that chance. If he rejects it, let him . . . well, then, let him prepare for the consequences, that's all. May I . . . may I drive back with you?"

He had summoned a hansom by waving his stick. Now he helped me in.

"May I?" he repeated.

"I think we had better say good-by here," I answered.

"Oh, well, just as you like, of course. It doesn't make much difference. I shall see you again very soon."

"Good-by, Julian."

"Good-by, good-by. Oh, Monica," he cried wildly, "tell me that you forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive you for, Julian."

"Nothing! You call it nothing? To have snatched him from the devil, and fastened him back again on you! Haven't you yourself said that so long as he lives . . . ? Oh, if he were dead! To see him lying dead at my feet . . . ! Tell me one thing, Monica, will you marry me when he is dead?"

"Oh, he won't die, Julian. He will outlive us all."

"I don't know. I'm not so sure. He's only a mortal man, after all. In the midst of life we are in death," he said, laughing curiously.

"But it won't happen. Such things never do happen in this world. It's generally the other person who dies. If a man is a brute or a drunkard or in any other way a burden or a nuisance to people, he lives to a green old age."

"But you haven't answered my question. If he were dead, you would be my wife, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you, Monica?"

"Oh, if he were dead, I would do anything you wished me to," I answered, rashly, in a sudden gush of passion.

"Well, he will either consent to a separation from you to-day, or I wouldn't advise a man to bet very heavily on his longevity. I think I shall have to kill him."

"If you could! But you can't," I said.

"'Who lives shall see,'" he quoted. "Good-by."

And the cab drove off.

To speak the bare truth, I had set my lover on to kill my husband; but it is also the truth that at the time I did not in the least realize what I had done. It did not once enter my mind to imagine that Julian's talk of killing the Prince might presently lead to the act of killing him. I took that talk as the expression of a mood rather than an intention. To wish for the Prince's death was a familiar mood to me, and it did not shock me; but I was far from perceiving that we had gone to-day a little beyond simply wishing for his death, that we had approached perilously near to plotting it. Familiar as the wish was to me, the idea was as unsubstantial, as intangible, as the idea of any impossible thing. It was as if I had wished for the earth to cease revolving on its axis; I might wish it as heartily as you please, but I could never for an instant fancy my wish accomplished. I had accustomed myself to consider the Prince as a person invincible, perhaps scarcely mortal, certainly, at any rate, destined to flourish long beyond my time; and it was stronger than a conviction, it was a law and habit of thought with me, that in whatsoever conflict might come to pass between him and any other human being, he would surely not be the sufferer. So, when Julian said, "I think I shall have to kill him," and other things of like tenor, I supposed him to be uttering an emotion in the form of a purpose, but I did not suppose that the purpose had any actuality in his mind. If I had supposed the latter, I daresay I should still not have been shocked, but I should have been filled with terror for Julian. I should have felt a terrible confidence not only that he would fail in his endeavor to kill the Prince, but that he would get himself killed by the Prince instead.

However, I do not say this by way of excusing myself. I am perfectly well aware that it is no excuse. I ought to have understood and calculated the results of my speech and attitude, and now I must not shirk the responsibility of them. Indeed, to acknowledge and assume that responsibility, is one of the chief objects that I have in making this confession. The newspapers have been full of false rumors; public gossip has seized upon every conceivable explanation except the right one. It is best on all accounts that the truth should be known; and the truth is that I, in the blindness of my pain and my passion, had set Julian North on to kill Prince Léonticheff.

III.

The following letters explain themselves.

The first, from Prince Léonticheff to me, was written at his club in the evening of the day when I had had my walk and talk with Julian in Hyde Park. . . .

"I am off for what one of your particular admirations in literature has called a little tour in France. I cross to-night, but shall return within a week. I think I can promise to bring you home a surprise."

The second, from Julian to Armidis, was written the same evening. . . .

"I am going to France for a few days. I will write again in the morning, explaining the whys and the wherefores."

And the third is the letter promised by the last. . . .

"Dear Armidis: I suppose you are somewhat curious to know why I am making this sudden invasion of France. I will tell you in three words: for the purpose of fighting a little duel with his Serene Highness Prince Léonticheff. If I did not say as much in the scrap of a note I sent you last night, it was because I preferred to leave you in ignorance of the matter until I had got well beyond your reach, where you couldn't interfere to stop me. Do you see? I am at this moment at Calais; but where I shall be two hours hence you will possess no possible means of discovering.

"As I told you yesterday, I had had an accidental meeting in Hyde Park with Monica. We took a walk and had a talk together; and the result of it was to show me more clearly than ever that I had contrived to make an extremely nasty hash of things. By dragging her husband out of the jaws of hell, where a kindly Providence had dropped him, I simply meddled with her life to mar it, and to perpetuate its wretchedness. That was exceedingly nice and pleasant, wasn't it? She informed me in as many words that so long as Léonticheff lived she could never look for anything remotely resembling happiness. She would not leave him, she could not, she did not dare, because he had threatened to visit his displeasure upon the head of her father. She must simply continue to endure his daily outrages and insults, until somebody went off the hooks—her husband, her father, or herself. It was plain enough that she cordially wished him dead, but was hopeless of his dying; and she could not conceal her regret at what I had done, though she is generous and bears me no grudge for it. 'Ah, yes, if he were dead!' she said. 'But he won't die. He will outlive us all.' You see, she understands his character pretty well, and she knows that he could never of his free will do anything so graceful as lie down and breathe his last like a gentleman. I pleaded with her not to go back to him, and to let him do his worst, and make a scapegoat of her father if he chose; but she would not hear of it. By and by I saw that I should never be able to shake her determination on this point; so I had to cast about for other expedients. I made up my mind, and I told her, that I would see the Prince myself. I would see him, and I would endeavor in all earnestness to persuade him to consent to let his wife live apart from him. I would give him that chance. If he refused it—well and good. The consequences would be upon his own head. If he refused it, then I would do the only other thing left in my power that might in some degree repair the mischief I had wrought, and set myself right with Monica and with my own conscience. I would, so far as possible, undo the evil I had done, by putting him back where he would have been if I hadn't hired that tug. I would give him an opportunity to save himself by consenting to a separation from his wife; and if he refused it, I would kill him.

"I told her all this, not in the same words, but to the same effect; and she approved. I don't mean that she answered me explicitly, 'Yes, go and kill him;' but she made it evident that she would not blame me if I did so, and she said that if he were dead, she would be happy.

"That is all I want to know.

"Now, Armidis, don't fly off the handle, but just listen to me quietly for one instant. There are two ways of looking at the question of killing a man. There is the transcendental-sentimental way, and there is the way of reason and of common sense. If you are a sentimental transcendentalist, as I am afraid you are, you may say of each separate human life that it is an awful and a sacred mystery, that it comes into being willy-nilly, we know not whence, or why, or to what end, and that therefore to tamper with it is to tamper with the secret things of the Unknowable. That is one view; perhaps it is your view; if so, to be consistent, you would not believe yourself entitled to kill another man even in self-defence, and you would wish to see malefactors go unhanged. It is a permissible view, but it is scarcely the view of common sense, and it is certainly not the view taken by society. Society has agreed from time immemorial that under various circumstances it is entirely justifiable to put men to death; and death-dealing machinery is a part and parcel of society's regular equipment—sword-arms and fire-arms, gallows and guillotines. If I am a soldier, and you are an enemy, and I shoot you down in battle, who dreams of blaming me? If I am a mere civilian, and you attack me, am I not authorized by public opinion and by the laws of the land to kill you to protect myself? That is the view of the subject taken by most sane inhabitants of the civilized world: that there is justifiable homicide as well as unjustifiable homicide: in other words, that the killing of a man is not *per se* criminal, but that it depends for its moral quality upon the particular circumstances of the particular case.

"Very good. Now, what I say is this: I say that if it has ever been, under any circumstances, justifiable to put a man to death—if it can ever be, under any imaginable circumstances, justifiable for one man to kill another—then it is abundantly justifiable now, and under these circumstances for me to kill Léonticheff. He is, as you know, guilty of crimes as black and horrible as any that any blackguard on this earth has ever committed; but they are crimes for which there is no sort of remedy in law. He has fastened himself like a vampire upon an innocent and defenceless woman; he is sucking her life out; and there is no relief possible for her except in his death—no relief, no release. She is his prisoner, and daily he loads her with every species of ignominy and misery that his ingenuity can invent: he strikes her, he spits upon her, he empties his mind of its foulness by vile speech in her presence—God knows what else and worse he may do. It is exactly as though she had been taken captive by North American Indians, or by Sicilian banditti. Would I not be justified in killing them for the sake of rescuing her? Who would dream of blaming me? And in what respect is the case of the Indian different to the case of the European? How does the fact that the latter is rich, that he can read and write, that he dresses in clothes made by Poole instead of in skins and feathers, that his face is the color of raw beef instead of the color of copper, and that he talks Tartar instead of Chocktaw—how do any of these facts operate to render the killing of him more sinful or less righteous than the killing of the savage?

"You yourself will not pretend to deny that on general principles his death would be a highly desirable thing. Suppose that the other day at Greal I hadn't happened to learn that a man was clinging to that bell-buoy; suppose that consequently he had been left to drown there at his leisure: what would you have said at receiving the news of his death? What would any fair-minded man, informed of the manner of his life, have said? Come, now, be honest, and answer me that. Wouldn't you have said, Thank Providence? Wouldn't you have said, Good riddance to bad rubbish? You would have said that in every way, from every point of view, it was a thing to be grateful for. Well, if his death would have been a matter for rejoicing under those circumstances, pray tell me why not under these? In the one case he would have died as the result of an accident, and you would have cried, Good! In this case he is going to die as the result of design: will you not again cry, Good? You will, if you have a single atom of logic and fairness in your composition.

"And then, look you, Armidis, I in a sense own the man. But for me he would have been dead and damned five days ago. If I kill him now, it won't be like an ordinary homicide; I shall simply be undoing what I myself have done. Do you mean to tell me that a man has not the right, supposing him to have the power, to undo what he has done? That a man has not the right to alter his mind, and amend a past error, if amendment is possible? Oh, it's too ridiculous, it's too preposterous; you can't stand up and maintain any such rank nonsense as that. Look: what I did was unmitigated evil. My hauling Léonticheff out of the water was an act of unmitigated evil. Now I say, it is not only my right, it is my sacred duty to go back and undo it if I can. Here—I was just supposing the case of an Indian; add to that supposition this further one, that she was on the point of escaping from him, of regaining her liberty, and then I, I myself, blundered into stopping her, and restored her to him: would I not be doubly, trebly, justified in killing him, after I realized what I had done? Do you imagine that I am going to live out my life with that hideous fact burning forever in my memory—that Monica was within an ace of being delivered from him, and that then I stepped in to prevent it, and that therefore for every future blow he strikes her, for every insult he offers her, I am directly to blame? What have I done to deserve such a hell on earth as that? No! I am made of flesh and blood; and there is a limit to what flesh and blood can stand, to what it ought to stand. For my sake, for her sake, for the sake of common decency and justice, I must mend the mischief by letting the life out of him, damn his soul!

"But I must tell you my story in proper order.

"I left Monica yesterday morning outside Kensington Gardens, and I went home and I found there a note from Léonticheff inviting me to call at Salchester House in the afternoon, to hear his wife give herself the lie, and retract the charges she had laid at his door the day before. The man is sadly lacking in humor, and he wrote me that with a perfectly straight face. I sat down, also with a straight face, and I answered him to the effect that it would not suit my convenience to call at Salchester House, but that I desired to see him in private about a certain matter, and would meet him at the *** Club at any hour he would name. I sent my missive by a commissionaire, who brought me back a line from the Prince saying that he would be on the spot at three o'clock. At that time accordingly I met him there, and we had considerable talk. I gave him his chance. But, Armidis, he is quite the most impossible person that God has ever created. I told him I thought he had better consent to let his wife live apart from him, and I advanced a hundred excellent reasons in favor of that course ; but the poor man couldn't seem to see it. Finally, therefore, convinced that further argument would be wasted, I laid down my ultimatum. I told him very frankly that if he couldn't agree to a separation from his wife, I should find myself obliged to kill him. I explained the situation to him pretty fully, and he was clever enough to perceive that I had abundant motives for my enterprise. He said, however, that he was afraid I would fail in it, because he had reason to regard himself as rather a hard man to kill. I replied that he need give himself no uneasiness on that score, and I added that, although if I shot him down in cold blood on the spot, he would be getting no more than he jolly well deserved, nevertheless for the satisfaction of my own æsthetic tastes, I had determined to take his life in equal combat; that is to say, I proposed a duel. He demurred a little, talking some sentimental rubbish about my having saved his life, and protesting that therefore he had no desire to see my blood flow; but when I assured him that there was not the slightest danger of his having that experience, inasmuch as I had fully made up my mind to examine the color of his, and when I added that I suspected his reluctance was rather the result of cowardice than of humanity, he said he would meet my wishes, and referred me to his friend Count Feyghine for the arrangement of the practical details.

"I know so few men in London at all intimately that I was rather hard put to it to find a second for myself.

But at last I thought of Coutances, the impressionist, and I went to him. He is a Frenchman, and he at once consented to serve. He hurried off to see Feyghine, and when he returned everything had been agreed upon. We transact our business to-morrow morning bright and early in the fields outside a little village whose name does not matter, and the weapons are to be pistols. Léonticheff's second witness will be a Pole named Tchigulski, and mine a friend of Coutances' named Margerie, both residents of Paris. Naturally enough, we don't care to let the real reason of our difference be known; to avoid which we all dine together to-night, in the course of the dinner Léonticheff and I quarrel, and a duel is then and there arranged.

"You needn't have the slightest anxiety on my account. I am going to kill Léonticheff. You may take that as a deliverance *ex cathedrâ.* I do not admit for a moment that there is any possibility of the affair going against me. You may comfort yourself with the knowledge that I am a first-rate shot; and then as they say in America, my 'dander is 'way up.' Beside, I have the right on my side; I believe that God is on my side. I shall kill him with no more compunction than I should feel in killing a grizzly bear.

"I leave it to your own discretion whether or not to show this letter to *her.*

"Good-by. I ought to be home again within three days, or a week at the latest. But of course the *procès verbal* may delay me a bit.

"Always yours, J. N."

. . . . .

And now! . . .

Now I realized what I had done. I realized what my speech and manner that morning in the Park with Julian had led to, had brought to pass. He and my husband had gone to fight a duel; he had provoked my husband to a duel, and he had done so because I had given him to understand that I would be glad if the Prince were dead. And now—now he would be killed! The Prince would kill him! And it would be my fault, all my fault.

My state of mind may be imagined: my remorse, my terror, the agony of suspense in which I waited to learn for certain how it had gone.

Remorse? Yes; but not as yet remorse for having encouraged Julian to seek the life of Prince Léonticheff, only remorse for having led him to imperil his own. He would be killed, he would be killed; and it was all my fault! When I said to myself, "Suppose . . . only suppose . . . that by some wonderful chance he should *not* be killed . . . suppose he should kill his adversary . . . !"—when I allowed myself to suppose that, my heart bounded with a joy that was fearful in its violence. But that was not because I wished Prince Léonticheff dead; it was because I wished Julian alive. I had forgotten now to wish for Prince Léonticheff's death, to wish for anything, to care for anything, except just this, that Julian might not be killed. Every other thought and emotion had been swept from me by the one overmastering prayer, that Julian might not be killed.

"And yet," said Armidis, "that would be better than the alternative—better than that he should kill your husband."

"Better . . . !" I cried, aghast.

"Yes; precisely; better. Because, don't you see, if Julian should kill your husband, the poor lad's hands will be stained with blood; and for men of sensitive nervous organization, like his, blood-stains burn as long as life lasts. They're extremely nasty."

"Oh," I said, "if he only comes out of it alive, it will be all I ask."

But strong as my wish was, I had no sort of hope. For me, it was as if he were already dead. I had sent him to his death!

"You see," Armidis went on, "at the best you will have only changed the form of your misery; you won't have reduced it; you won't have gained anything. At the best—that is, of course, the best from your point of view: supposing Julian to come off untouched, leaving your husband dead on the field—you will simply have got rid of a bad husband in exchange for a bad conscience. Oh, but a dreadful conscience, my dear! You will find it unpleasant enough to remember all your life that you have been the cause of one man's death; but you will find it unpleasanter still to remember that you have made of another man a murderer, that you have branded the man you love with the mark of Cain."

"He will not be a murderer. If he kills him in a duel, it will not be a murder. He exposes his own life to equal danger. It is absurd to speak of it as murder."

"Ah, my dear, you are as cunning as a Jesuit. You draw a distinction without a difference; whereas there is a real distinction *with* a difference which you do not appear to feel. There are, as one may say, duels and duels: duels forgivable, and duels unforgivable; duels venial, and duels mortal. There is the duel into which a man is driven by stress of circumstances, and in which he desires not the death of his adversary, but the vindication of his honor; such a duel may perhaps be pardonable. But in matters of this sort the spirit is everything. The spirit! And Julian's spirit, the spirit in which Julian has so far acted, is simply the spirit of any murderer. He makes up his mind to kill Léonticheff, and then he selects his method. He selects the method of duelling, just as he might have selected poisoning, just as he might have selected the homelier method of sticking a knife between his ribs. He does this, as he says, for the satisfaction of his æsthetic tastes; he does it in truth to the end of dulling and deceiving his own conscience. He determines to kill your husband; and then he seeks him out and forces a duel upon him, for the sheer sake of killing him, and nothing else. It is murder. Whoso looketh upon another to desire his death is guilty of murder in his heart. The fact that I expose my own life to equal danger does not alter the moral quality of what I do; I am less a coward, if you please, but I am not less an assassin. These are fine shades; perhaps you cannot see them. You are growing a little color-blind. I told you long ago that your marriage with Léonticheff would demoralize you; I seem to have prophesied correctly."

"You despise me! Why do you come here to me, if you have nothing but reproaches to heap upon me? If whoso looketh upon another to desire his death is guilty of murder in his heart, then I am a murderess ten times over. How can one help desiring the death of a man who blights one's whole life, who robs one of one's life? You never loved the Prince; why should you take the notion of his death so hard?"

"It is not, Monica, that I abhor the Prince the less, but that I love you—you and Julian—the more. You will have done one of two things: you will have caused Julian's death, or you will have ruined his life. Neither will be a pleasant memory for you."

"Oh, yes, I know, I shall have caused his death. I know that well enough, God help me. You do not need to remind me of that. Prince Léonticheff will kill him, and it will be all my fault. Yes, I never can forget that. I have sent him to his death."

"Well," said Armidis, "it is a bad business, any way you look at it. I can't pretend to offer you any comfort; the situation admits of none. Now there is nothing for us to do but wait and see. Of course it is always on the cards that they will come out of it with nothing worse than a scratch or two apiece."

"No, they will fight to the death. I am sure of that," I said.

The following paragraph appeared in that evening's papers . . .

"REPORTED SHOOTING OF PRINCE LÉONTICHEFF.

"A General Press despatch from Paris says: A duel was fought at an early hour this morning, in the country near Malpierre, between Prince Léonticheff and Mr. Julian North, an artist of London. Pistols were used, and but one round exchanged, Prince Léonticheff falling shot through the heart, and expiring almost instantly. There were present two surgeons, Count Feyghine and M. de Tchigulski as witnesses for the Prince, and Messieurs Margerie and Coutances for Mr. North. The gentlemen are said to have quarrelled at dinner last night, but it is rumored that there is a woman in the case. The two surgeons and the witnesses have signed a declaration stating that everything was conducted regularly and in accordance with the laws relating to duelling. It is not considered probable that the authorities will institute an investigation."

Oh, as I read that, the great wave of joyous gratitude that welled up in my heart! . . . Not that Prince Léonticheff was dead, but that Julian was alive! Julian, thank God, was alive! The news that Prince Léonticheff was dead did not at the time impress me or affect me in any way. I could not realize the fact, nor appreciate what it meant—how utterly and fundamentally it would revolutionize my life, how it would change for better or for worse the whole hue and flavor of my future. I could not take it in; it was a mere detail and side-issue. Nothing in the world seemed to signify any more, now that I knew that Julian had escaped unharmed.

Armidis said, "God pity you. God pity you and him. Now you have passed through the gate of tears, you have passed through the gate of fire, and there is no turning back."

IV.

At the moment I could think of nothing else than this, that Julian had passed through that fearful peril, and had escaped unharmed; I could think of nothing else, and the only emotion there was room for in my heart was one of unutterable relief and gratitude. I had sent him into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and he had come out unharmed! That was all, but that was enough.

By and by, however, I began to repeat to myself, "And Prince Léonticheff is dead! He is dead, he is dead, he is dead! Do you understand!"

At first, no, I did not understand, I could not grasp it or realize it. But then at last, suddenly, the tremendous significance of it flashed upon me, and my heart gave another great terrible bound. . . . .

"Oh, he is dead!" I cried out. "He is dead! I never shall see him again! He never can trouble me in any way again! He is dead! I am free! I am delivered from him! Oh, my God!"

"Free?" echoed Armidis. "My dear, you were never less free than you are now, than you must be henceforth. Before, you were bound and bowed down by a heavy weight of sorrow; but now and henceforth forever you will find yourself fettered body and soul in the toils of guilt, in the chains of crime, and they will burn you unceasingly like red-hot irons. You have built your own prison-house, my dear; you have enclosed yourself within it."

"Oh, but he is dead," I repeated. "Prince Léonticheff is dead. Oh, what more can I ask or want? He is dead and Julian is alive."

"Do you mean to tell me seriously," questioned Armidis, "that the fact of his death brings you no other feeling than joy at your deliverance from him? Doesn't it shock you a little? Doesn't it terrify you a little? He is dead, yes; but that is not all. If that were all, you should have my heartiest congratulations, and I should join in your rejoicing. But, alas, it isn't all. It is only the beginning, or it is only the end, as you choose to take it. Not only is he dead, but it is you who have caused his death, it is you who have killed him. And that puts an altogether different light upon the matter. You have killed him just as truly as if you had done it with your own hand. Julian has shot him, but it was you who inspired him to do so; you were what the lawyers call an accessory before the fact. He was your mere instrument, your agent, your cat's-paw."

"Oh," I cried, "what can I care for all that? What is the use of quibbling and juggling words? He is dead! Just think of that! He is dead. The shadow is lifted from my life. He will never darken it any more. I shall never—never!—have to see him, or listen to him, or speak with him, any more! What does it matter how he died, so long as he is dead? Oh, to think that I never need fear him any more! If you could know, if you could put yourself in my place, you would understand. If you had lived with him, in constant loathing of him, in constant dread and terror of him, for five years! I never knew till now how I had suffered. I never realized how heavy my load had been, till now that it has fallen off. Oh, it seems as if my heart would over-flow. He is dead, and Julian is safe and unhurt."

"I wonder whether you have really become as hardened as all that," said Armidis. "Or is it the Tartar in you, waking at a scratch! Or is it simply a temporary aberration of your conscience? There is blood on your hands, there is a dead man's body at your feet; you are a woman, I suppose, and yet you don't so much as shudder."

"Why should you wish me to be a hypocrite?" I retorted. "I don't understand you at all. Nobody ever despised Prince Léonticheff as bitterly as you did; nobody ever thought or said worse things of him. But now—one would suppose you had loved him like a brother. I don't know why I should feign what I do not really feel. I don't know why I should conceal my true feelings from you. It is not as if you were a stranger. You have been in my confidence from the beginning."

"Well, wait and see. It is too early in the game to foretell how it will end," Armidis said.

. . . . . .

They brought the body back to England, and buried it in the park at Argelby, Prince Léonticheff's seat in Berkshire. That was in obedience to a wish that he had expressed to Count Feyghine, before the duel.

. . . . . .

The newspapers followed up their first meagre reports of the affair with longer ones; and these three facts were well ventilated: that the same Mr. North who had shot Prince Léonticheff had, before the Prince's time, been engaged to the lady who afterward became the Princess; that he was also the same Mr. North who, a few days ago, had rescued the Prince from drowning at Greal; and that a day or two after the rescue and before the duel, while Mr. North was paying a call at Salchester House, the Princess had made a tremendous scene in the library!

I lived of course in absolute seclusion, seeing no one but Armidis and my servants. I received, however, a great many letters; and I learned that all the world was gossiping about me, and accusing me of having induced my lover to kill my husband. I knew too that the word "lover" was used in its least innocent sense.

Armidis said, "Of course, that is no more than you are bound to expect. Scandal has marked you for its own. That was inevitable, in the circumstances."

I answered, "It is a matter of total indifference to me. Or, rather, no; I am glad of it. Because now I shall feel at perfect liberty to do as I choose in all things . . . since they have said the worst they can say of me, already."

Meanwhile we had had but a single word from Julian . . .

"Dear Armidis: You have seen by the papers how the thing has gone. I shall not be coming home quite yet awhile. I would rather not see anybody just yet. I want to wait till I have got a little used to it. I feel very queer.

"God bless you. Please be all you can to her, do all you can for her, in these trying times. I hope she is happy.

"J. N."

"He feels very queer," said Armidis. "I should hope so. He'd *be* very queer if he didn't. He has killed a man."

"He has killed a man in a perfectly fair duel," I answered. "The man was a monster, and he killed him in a duel. There is no reason why he should feel anything except that he has done a good deed. You speak as if he had stabbed the man in his bed."

"The difference is only one of form, not one of matter. Poison is poison, whether it be concealed in a finger-ring, or openly displayed in a bottle labelled with a death's head."

"Oh," I cried, "you are what Julian called you. You are a transcendental-sentimentalist."

"Mercy upon me! What a dreadful name! Crusher! But never mind, my dear. I am your true friend. And though you seem to me very hard and strange, I could not love you better if I were your father."

My father! My father, upon reading the report of Prince Léonticheff's death in the Russian newspapers, had written me the cruellest of cruel letters, taking my guilt for granted, and denouncing me not only as the murderess of my husband, but as the first woman of our family to bring a blot upon its scutcheon.

But I did not mind all this especially; not the scandal of the world; nor the cold morality of Armidis; nor the bitterness and injustice of my father. Prince Léonticheff was dead! He had disappeared from out of my life. I was free. The burden that had bowed down my shoulders, the fear and the disgust that had filled my heart, for so many years, were gone. There is no reason why I should disguise the truth. Not only had his death not grieved me, it had not even shocked me in any degree; it had simply relieved me; I was glad of it.

What I wished most for was to see Julian. I did not know when he would return, but I counted the hours. I longed to see him with my eyes, to touch his hand, to hear his voice, I longed to feel him near to me. The longing was acute and unceasing, like a spiritual hunger. I longed for an opportunity to pour out for him the great store of love and gratitude that were garnered for him in my heart. He had taken such an awful risk for my sake, he had rendered me a service so immeasurable! The devotion of my life should be his henceforth; but nothing, not even that, could ever adequately pay him, or discharge my debt. I had a thousand things to say to him, a thousand plans to propose to him, when he came home.

But when would he come? Why did he delay his coming, like this? I should have supposed he would be as eager to see me, as I was to see him. Then why did he not come home?

"The time seems very long. Will he never come?" I asked of Armidis.

"Oh, he feels queer, he feels queer, you see," Armidis repeated. "He has killed a man. Therefore he has a state of mind."

"Oh, will you never finish harping on that string?" I cried in anger.

"Well, suppose he should come, suppose he were at home at this very instant—you couldn't see him, you know. That wouldn't do at all."

"Wouldn't do . . . ?"

"Why, consider the proprieties! How could you with any sort of countenance have a meeting with a man hot and red-handed from killing your husband? You must observe the conventions of your widowhood. What would people say?"

"It makes me smile to hear you preaching the conventions and the proprieties, you of all men. I don't care what people would say. They can say nothing worse than they have said already."

"Quite so. But they don't more than half believe what they say at present. If you and Julian should be known to have met, on the other hand, it would be confirmation strong as proofs from holy writ."

"Well, I don't care. I don't care what people say or believe. But I don't see why we could not meet without anybody's knowing it at all."

"There speaks the woman, who loveth mystery, subterfuge, intrigue. A secret meeting! Yes, it would be romantic. But I don't think it will come to pass. I doubt if Julian will return to England for many a long day."

"What do you mean? Have you heard from him? What is it?"

"Yes, I had a second note from him this morning. Here . . ."

He handed me this note . . .

"DEAR ARMIDIS: Please tell Calebs to pack some clothes in the yellow leather box, and send them to me at No. 32, Rue de Bourgogne, Paris. I am thinking of going away somewhere, I don't know just where. On some accounts I should like to come to London, on others I dread doing so; and on general principles I believe I had better keep away. I don't know just what good I could do by being there, and I can imagine a deal of harm. I never dreamed that I should feel like this. I can't get it out of my mind. Sometimes I feel as if I would give my life just to see her for a little while, and then at others I feel as if I could not bear to meet her. It is the same about you. Sometimes I long for a sight of you, a word with you, and then at other times I shrink from the mere thought. You see, it has upset me. But I shall get over it, and be myself again, presently. So long as I can feel sure that she is the better off for what I have done, I cannot repent it. I have twenty times been at the point of coming to London, and then at the last moment I changed my mind.

"Always, J. N."

"You see, it is as I said," commented Armidis; "he has a state of mind. You may answer that he had a state of mind before he did it. Then he remembered that he had saved your husband's life, and that made him writhe; but now he remembers that he has taken it, and that is worse. I have never taken anyone's life myself; but I know how I should feel. Imagination! The whole color of the world would be changed for me; I should feel the mark of Cain perpetually scorching my forehead; I should feel cut off utterly from the fellowship of other men and women, of those who hadn't done what I had done. It would be an experience of a nature to shake and overturn my life from its deepest roots. It would alter the very essence of my soul. I should feel that I had changed my skin, and become a member of another race. A race apart. You have called me a naughty name; you have called me a transcendental-sentimentalist. But the point is that Julian is another. Unless I am very much mistaken his state of mind is like what I have been describing. Blood has been spilled upon him. It is like sulphuric acid; first it eats into the skin, smarting like fire; then it will eat through the bones and the muscles, into the inmost heart. Poor Julian!"

This was in the evening, about ten o'clock, at Salchester House. A little later that same evening Armidis's man, Calebs, called, and asked to see his master. When Armidis returned to me, he looked very grave.

"He has come home," he said, and handed me a sheet of paper . . .

"I could not stand it any longer. I thought I was going away, but I have come home. They tell me you are with her. I should like to see you whenever she can spare you."

It was in Julian's handwriting.

"I think I had better go to him at once," said Armidis.

"Yes. I will go with you," I said.

"Oh, no!" he cried.

"Yes. I must. I want to see him."

"But consider. . . . It is the height of imprudence."

"You used to tell me to throw prudence to the dogs."

"But suppose—suppose he should not wish to see you?"

"I am going with you," I repeated. And I ordered my brougham.

V.

Armidis opened the door of the house with his latch-key, and stood aside for me to enter. I hastened through the hall, into the studio, where I took for granted that Julian would be waiting. The room was lighted by candles, a light soft and rich, but dim, so that at first objects and shadows were not quite distinguishable. But after a minute I saw him. He was seated in a deep arm-chair, before the empty fireplace. His head was thrown back, and his eyes were closed, but I did not think he was asleep. His profile was toward me; the skin gleamed waxen-white in the candlelight, and the cheeks and temples looked thin and sunken. I remained for an instant near the door, without moving or speaking. Armidis came in, up to my side, and stood there till his glance, wandering, rested on Julian. Then he nodded to me, and stole out of the room on tip-toe, shutting the door behind him.

"Julian!" I called, very low.

Slowly he opened his eyes, and turned his face in my direction. At first its expression was blank and puzzled, as if he had been suddenly recalled from a brown study, and did not recognize me; but all at once it lightened; and he cried, "Oh!" and sprang up, and advanced toward me. . . .

I stretched out my hands. Oh, how full my heart was! How tumultuously it throbbed!

But when he had taken three or four steps, he stopped, suddenly, shortly. He stood motionless for a second, staring at me with eyes that were almost vacant. Then a sort of spasm passed over his face, and he cried "Oh!" again; but this time it was like a sharp cry of pain. He made a sort of convulsive gesture with his arm, and turned around, and went back to his chair, dropping into it like something inert, rather than seating himself with the elasticity of life. He turned his face quite away from me.

I hurried up to him. . . .

"Julian! What is it? What is the matter!" I asked, in fright and anguish.

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know. I can't help it," he answered. There was something awful in the quality of his voice; a note that chilled me with unimaginable terrors.

I knelt down beside him, and looked up into his face. But he turned his eyes away from mine.

"Julian! What is it?" I entreated, in a moan.

Then he seemed to be seized by an impulse of tenderness. He put out his hands, and took mine, pressing them very hard, and he looked into my eyes with a look of great love, and he said, "Oh, my darling! My darling!" But instantly after that, the same spasm that I had seen before passed over his face, and he dropped my hands, and he shrank back into his chair, as if to avoid even the touch of my garments, and his eyes became as cold and impenetrable as steel, and his face somehow looked to me as if it were infinitely far away.

"Oh, Julian, what have I done? What is it?" I asked again.

He gave a short laugh, and appeared to recover himself. "Oh, it's nothing," he said lightly. "Nothing, except that I feel queer. It's been an experience, and I feel queer. But it doesn't matter. If you are happy, if you are glad, if it's been a service to you, it doesn't matter how I feel. I dare say I shall get over it."

"Oh, Julian, it isn't only that I am glad. It isn't only that you have rescued my life from a horror, and given it back to me. But it is the awful peril you encountered for my sake, the dreadful danger that you faced. What if you had been hurt! What if you had not come back to me! The thing that I am most thankful for, that I never can thank God enough for, is that you have come back safe and unharmed. Julian!"

He took my hands again in his, and murmured something inarticulate; while his eyes rested with mine for a minute, and seemed to devour me. It was as if for that minute our souls went out to each other, and met and mingled. But then his withdrew itself from mine; his eyes became hard and impenetrable again; he put away my hands, and he said, "You don't realize. You don't realize what I have done. If you realized that, you would understand."

"I do realize it, Julian. I know what you have done. What you have done is good, wholly good. It is good for everybody, good for the whole world. No harm, no pain, no evil, nothing but good, can come to any human being from what you have done."

"Except to myself. For me . . . oh!" He threw out his arms, and shuddered. "For me, it's been my undoing."

"Oh, why do you talk like that! Why do you feel like that? What do you mean?" I cried.

"I have killed a man. I have shot a man down in cold blood. I have seen him stagger, and totter, and turn half way round, and fall. I have heard the sickening noise he made as he fell, the dreadful noise of his last breath, the dull noise of his body striking the turf. I have seen him lying before me, red and white and dead. I have seen nothing else, I have heard nothing else, for eight days. Oh, it is horrible!" He put up his hand, shielding his eyes, as if to shut out a vision.

"Oh, my God!" I cried. "If it has made you feel like this! Oh, what shall I do? You said—you said it would be like shooting a mad dog; you said you would feel no more compunction than in killing a grizzly bear. What you have done! You have done a thing wholly, entirely good. You have put an evil thing out of existence. You have removed an evil thing from the world. That is what you have done."

"Yes, yes, I know that. I am sure of that. He was bad; it is a good thing that he is dead, that he is out of the way. The only doubt is whether it was a good thing that I should kill him. Whether that was not a greater evil still. It is a good thing that he has been removed; but was it my place, was it my business to remove him? After all, you see, he was a man. God made him, God kept him alive, God must have had some reason for it all; and I feel as if I had interfered. He was a man, yes, after all, a man. I never realized that, I think, until I saw him fall down dead before me. Then . . . ! Oh, if you had seen him there! It makes you feel queer, very queer, to see a man fall dead, and to know that you have killed him, that it is your doing. To see him lying dead there, and to know that he will never breathe or move again, and to realize that you have done it! To realize that you have done it, and that you can't undo it—never, never! It's rather awful. It upsets you, it overturns you, it changes your life utterly, in a single minute, changes its whole complexion. You see," he added, with a smile of irony, "one kills a man so rarely! It is an experience. I dare say if one had killed a great many men, one would get used to it. But it's the first step that costs. For me—I think in killing him I killed myself. I have felt as if a new self, a strange self, were in possession of me ever since"

His manner, his voice, the character of what he said, seemed to indicate great weariness, almost apathy; but an apathy, I felt, which was but the extreme point of profound and strenuous inward emotion.

"And I have brought this upon you!" I groaned. "I have brought you to this. But it can't last, Julian; it mustn't last; it is not as if you had done a wrong thing. You must let me, since I have brought it upon you, since it was for my sake, you must let me . . . you must let me comfort you, restore your happiness. The words sound so meaningless, but you understand. I love you, and I owe you everything. My life is yours now forever. Oh, you can't be unhappy long. It has shocked you, it has made you ill. But that will wear off; you will get well; I will make you well. Do you remember what you said? The world would be ours! It *is* ours now. There is nothing between us."

"Do you remember what the Lord said to Cain? *And now thou art cursed from the earth!* Those words have been ringing in my ears ever since. And now I am cursed from the earth! That is how I feel."

"Oh, to compare yourself to Cain! You are mad, Julian. You are morbid. You have killed a man in a duel. A perfectly fair duel, where he had an equal chance of killing you. Hundreds of men have killed men in duels before this, and they have not felt as you feel. . . . They have lived perfectly happy lives afterward."

"Well, I don't appear to be that sort of man. Anyhow, it is different. It was a duel, and it was fair enough, I suppose; but it wasn't an ordinary duel. It was a duel which I devised and manufactured simply and solely to the end of killing him. It wasn't a duel into which I was forced, nor one into which I entered impulsively, in hot blood. It was a duel into which I forced him, and into which I entered with my blood as cold and as serene as water. It was a duel which I concocted and brought to pass just with this one thought in my head, that I would kill him. But that doesn't matter much. The trouble is that I can't get it out of my mind, I can't chase it from my memory, I can't see anything else wherever I turn. The only thing I can see is his dead body lying there on the grass, limp and ghastly, with his white shirt all red with blood, and his eyes staring up with such a sickening, glassy look! I believe I shall never be able to see anything else as long as I live. Oh, my God!"

I knelt at his side, speechless, helpless, heart-sick, in despair.

"It is funny," he said. "A few days ago I was in an agony of mind because I had saved his life; now I seem to be in a worse agony because I have taken it."

Just the words that Armidis had spoken of him!

"I tell you all this very freely," he went on. "I am sorry to do so. I never meant to tell you. But you have come here. I can't keep silence. I suppose I had better tell you the truth."

"Yes, yes," I answered, automatically.

"I say to myself that he was a brute and a devil, and that his death means freedom and life for you; but it doesn't do any good. I suppose you will think me weak, weak and sensational. I can't help it. Perhaps . . . perhaps . . . well, then, perhaps it is the artistic temperament." He smiled grimly.

"I can think nothing but good of you," I said.

After a long silence, he began, "Yes, there's no getting around that. It has altered the whole complexion of my life. I am a different being, a different kind of being. I have crossed the line, I have passed the pale. I have been initiated into mysteries of which other men know nothing, dream nothing. I can have no fellows any more. I am alone, apart. The ordinary purposes of life, the ordinary occupations, pleasures, companionships, things to hope for, things to fear, to avoid—they have all lost their meaning for me, their meaning and their color and their savor. Or I have lost myself. It is the same thing. I have not been myself, known myself, felt myself for a single instant since. It isn't pleasant. I know it would be to throw you back into the depths of your great misery; and yet, while I am telling you the truth, I may as well tell you this, that there have been moments, many moments, when I have felt that I would sacrifice you, that I would give up heaven and earth and everything, that I would sit still and let them cut off my legs and arms and sear my body with red-hot irons, if I could only recall it and undo it, and be my own self again as I was before it happened. There! I was unhappy enough then, God knows; but I did not have this awful sense of difference, of isolation, from the rest of men. But now—well, it is as I said—I am alone, apart."

"You are not alone, you are not apart. You shall never be alone or apart. I am with you. I will never leave you. If it has removed you from the ordinary plane of life, has it not removed me with you, at your side? And so long as we are together, what does anything else matter? Aren't we sufficient to each other? You are sufficient to me. It is all I ask. Just to spend my life beside you, in devotion to you!"

"Yes, you are with me; that is true enough. We were partners in it, after all. We planned it together. Yes, it takes us two, just us two together, and separates us from all other human beings, from all human fellowship and communion. *They* may not feel it, but we will, we must. They will see in us only a man and a woman; but we will *know!* It unites us as nothing else ever could have done; it binds us together with chains."

"Well, so much the better!" I cried. "I don't believe that what you say is true; I don't see how it can, or how it should, separate us so from other people; I am sure that this feeling of yours will wear away; it is only a first result; the final one must be different. But suppose that I am wrong, and you are right—so long as we have each other! I cannot wish for anything more."

"Ah, but . . . ! It unites us, yes; it joins us together, yes; but at the same time it has another effect, a contrary effect. It binds us together indissolubly, and yet it divides us utterly, it puts us utterly, irrevocably asunder."

"Asunder? I don't understand that," I said.

"Oh!" he cried wildly, in sudden passion, starting up from his chair. "Don't you see? Look! Look!" He pointed to the floor, between us, staring with wide horrified eyes, his face white as paper. "Look! There is a dead body between us! There is blood between us! We cannot cross it—never, never! Because it is there, it is immovably there! It must keep us always, always apart. And yet we cannot leave it, we cannot go away from it, all our lives we must remain there, one on either side of it! Always within sight of each other, yet never near enough to touch, never daring to speak, because of the awful dead thing that lies between us! Oh, my God! God help us! We are like two slaves, condemned to carry the same burden, a heavy burden, a ghastly burden—a corpse! a dead man's body!—condemned to carry it between us, one at each end, yet never allowed to exchange a word, never allowed to touch each other's hands, never a word or touch of sympathy, of compassion, of encouragement!"

I went up to him, and put my hand upon his shoulder. "Oh, Julian, for mercy's sake, calm yourself," I begged him.

"Don't touch me!" he cried harshly, starting away from me. But then, instantly, "Oh, forgive me! It was the horror of it. Forgive me!" And suddenly he threw his arms around me, and strained me to him, covering my face with kisses, and repeating my name, "Monica! Monica! Monica!"

But then, as suddenly as he had seized me, he released me, and moved a few steps away.

"We have gone from the devil to the deep sea, I am afraid," he said. "We have got rid of Léonticheff, but we've got this horror in his place. We have only changed one misery for another. What sort of world is this? On what principle does God distribute His punishments and His rewards? Léonticheff never suffered for his sins. He sinned, and sinned, and sinned again, and was never the worse for it, was he? We sin just once, if it was a sin to kill him, and see how we are overwhelmed! The punishment is capricious and one-sided. Ten guiltier men than I go free; why must I suffer? It isn't fair.

"You mustn't suffer, Julian; you shouldn't suffer; you won't suffer, after a little while. It wasn't a sin to kill him. Your suffering is only for the moment. It is a shock. It will pass. It must pass. If you love me, if you care for my love, you cannot be unhappy long."

"Ah, that's just the point! If I love you!"

"You do love me, don't you?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know . . . !" I faltered.

"I don't know. I'm not sure. Or, rather, yes, I do love you, only . . . it's this way. Everything is so changed. All my feelings are so different. Sometimes I love you; sometimes I think that my love is dead, that I have killed it, that it has been destroyed, swept away, in the general overturn. That is the worst part of the whole affair. It seems to have killed, to have burned out from my heart, every other feeling, every other thought or interest. Yes, at moments I love you, I seem to love you more entirely than ever before; then at other moments the horror of the thing simply overwhelms me, and obscures my love, and I cannot find anything in me but indifference toward you. I think of you, I speak your name, I picture your face before me, but they do not move me or affect me any more than the thought or the name or the face of a stranger would. I am speaking the truth brutally, but you may as well understand it first as last. Then at other times still, it does not stop at that. The horror of it mounts and mounts, till it seems to penetrate every atom of my brain and body; and then I am no longer indifferent to you, but my horror includes you in it, and I . . . well, then . . . I hate you. Then by and by my love comes back, and so it goes, alternating in waves. Day, evening, night; love, indifference, hate."

"Oh, merciful God! I have made you hate me!" I cried.

"No, no, no, not that. You have not *made* me hate you. I don't mean that I do hate you, either, exactly; I mean simply that the horror which is upon me sometimes includes you, as it includes every other thing, person, circumstance, in any way connected with what I have done. The boat I crossed the Channel in, the inn I stayed in at Calais, the people I passed in the streets the day before the duel, Malpierre, and the field in which we met, and the grass we stood on, and the men who were present, the very sky above our heads, the air we breathed—my horror is over all these things; and sometimes, not always, it includes you. . . . That is the worst of it all."

"Then . . . that . . . that is why, when I first came into the room, and called you, and you were coming toward me, that is why all at once you started back, and turned away from me! You hate me because it was I who set you on to do it! Oh, I deserve it, I suppose I deserve it."

"No!" he cried, coming to me, and taking me in his arms again, and drawing me down at his side, upon a sofa. "No, you don't deserve it, and it isn't so. It was only an illusion; but now when I see you, yourself, really here near to me, and know that it is you, your own real self, no, I feel nothing in the world but just love for you, and joy in you. Everything else goes; and so far from my horror at that thing obscuring my love, my love chases away the horror. Oh, it is you! And you love me! And you will be mine! You will be my wife! There is nothing to keep us apart any longer!"

"Nothing, nothing! I will be your wife. I will be anything and everything to you that a woman can be to the man she loves, to the man who has faced death for her, and delivered her from the evil that was over her whole life. Oh, you will not be unhappy. Tell me, promise me, you won't."

"Unhappy! I can't believe I have ever been unhappy. I am the happiest man in the whole world," he said. Then he laughed, and added, "I'm sure you never can guess what I thought of just then."

"What? Tell me."

He looked at me with smiling eyes for a moment; and then he said, "Do you remember? What we used to comfort ourselves with in the old days in Paris? *Entre nous le passé ne valait pas le diable; l'avenir sera délectable; en attendant jouissons du present!*"

"*Eh bien, donc, jouissons en!*" I whispered, laughing for happiness.

And then . . .

VI.

THE next morning, at Salchester House, I received this letter from him . . .

"No, it is no use. After I left you, it all came back upon me, ten times stronger than before. You see, I was not quite frank last night. I told you nothing but the truth, yet I did not tell you the whole truth. I told you what I felt, I did not tell you what I thought. My feelings, you said, would pass away; I did not contradict you; indeed, I tried to lull myself into believing as you did for the time; but down deep I knew they would not pass, I knew they could not. If they were feelings alone, and stood by themselves—rested upon themselves—yes, they would most likely pass. A mere wound must heal after a certain lapse of time; but where it is not a mere wound? Where it is a sore, the consequence of a poison in the very composition of the blood? The truth is that they are not simply *feelings;* they do not rest upon themselves; they rest upon a conviction, they are the consequences of a conviction—a conviction that has within a few days become as deeply rooted and as vital in me as my life itself. That is what I concealed last night, what I tried to forget last night.

"It has come upon me, Monica, very late in the day and very suddenly, you may say, but not with less force or staying power because of its tardiness or its suddenness; it came upon me with overwhelming force, like a voice from the sky, the very second I saw him fall—this conviction: that I had been deceiving myself and making my conscience drunk with lies and sophistries, and that, in bare reality, I had meditated, compassed, and now committed a crime, a great, terrible, irremediable crime. When I saw him turn, and totter, and fall—it was as if the skies opened, and the voice of God cried out, *And now thou art cursed from the earth*, and the hand of God placed a seal upon my brow! Why did God let me go so far? Why did He not open His skies, and let me hear His voice, before it was too late? Or, having allowed me to go so far, why could He not have allowed me to go on forever? Why, when it *was* too late, let me hear His voice at all?

"Anyhow, I must try to explain it to you.

"We, you and I, were in a terrible situation; that is undeniable; a situation partly thrust upon us, partly of our own making; and one as heavily fraught with pain as almost any human situation can be. But we had this one consolation, though we did not realize how great a consolation it was—we were innocent, our hands were clean. So, though we did not know it, our situation was not altogether hopeless. I see now—it is a truism, but for me it is a new discovery—I see that so long as a man's own soul is innocent, his own hands clean, no situation in which he can be placed is altogether hopeless. But ours seemed hopeless to us; our pain obscured our vision; it seemed hopeless to us, and it seemed intolerable; and we looked about for a way out of it. No, we were hemmed in on all sides; only at one point we saw what looked like a way out of it, we saw one little opening. There was just one path, one gate, through which we could make our escape; we did not stop to question whither that path led, whether possibly it might lead to another situation worse and more intolerable still; it was a way out, and we took it.

"Well, the one gate we saw was the gate of sin, the path was the path to hell. That is where I find it has brought me, anyhow. We had been innocent, our hands had been clean; but after we had passed that gateway, we were guilty, our hands were stained with blood! We fought the devil, as the saying is, with fire. We endeavored to overcome one evil with another evil, a greater evil. It didn't pay. For me, I confess, I have got the worst of it. We have exchanged a situation that was bad enough, but not hopeless, for a situation that is worse, and that *is* hopeless. Our parts in the play had been those of injured innocence; we were the victims: but now we are the heavy villains.

"I don't know whether I make myself clear to you! but it has all come upon me with a force and a light as great and as certain as if it were a revelation straight from God. Before, we were the victims; now we are the heavy villains! The shot I fired turned the tables quite around. We had been in the right; it put us in the wrong. The same shot that killed Léonticheff's body, destroyed our souls, destroyed the innocence of our lives, and placed anything approaching happiness or peace forever, forever beyond our reach. Could we ever, do you think, be happy together, with that awful burden of guilt between us? Knowing the price at which we had purchased our liberty and our unity? We could never be otherwise than utterly miserable; we would come to blame each other, to lay the responsibility each at the other's door, to hate each other. I preach? No, no, it isn't that. Only I know that I have committed a dreadful crime; a crime which I can never undo, or atone for; and I know that I can never forget it, that I can never ease my mind or my memory or my conscience of the weight of it. Do not deceive yourself with the notion that I am simply upset and shocked, because I saw a man fall dead before me by my hand. That is bad enough, but if I had killed a man under circumstances which I could consider justifiable, I should be sure that a little time would make that right. If I had killed a man when he was in the actual fact of attacking you, for instance, and I knew that I must kill him to save your life! But I killed him in circumstances that were not justifiable; I killed him because I wanted to get him out of the way; I murdered him; and I never can get over that. Don't misunderstand me; I am not sorry that he is dead, I am glad that he is dead; his death was, so far as I can see, in every way a desirable event; I am only sorry that *I killed him;* I think his death was desirable, but I think it was more desirable still that you and I should retain intact the innocence of our souls. It is this way: better that a thousand guilty men should live and prosper, than that one innocent man should become guilty.

"What am I going to do? Well, I will tell you in one word that I cannot bear it any longer. I have borne it unceasingly every hour of every day and night since it happened. I can't describe what I have suffered, I can't give you any idea of it. My life has simply been steeped in horror . . . horror when I lie down, and horror when I get up, horror, horror, horror! I once saw a man in *delirium tremens.* I dare say the comparison is grotesque, but I feel just as he appeared to feel. Everything I see, every sound I hear, makes me start and tremble through and through with horror. I can't bear it any longer, it is unbearable; I don't know any reason why I should try to bear it; it is too much. As long as I live, it must be so, it must be the same; as long as I remember. Therefore, the shorter my life, the better for me. If I knew of some good cause in which I could lay down my life, I believe I should go and do it. But I am not aware of any good cause in the world at present wherein a man can serve, and yet die an instant death. Nowadays you must live, if you would serve a cause. I cannot live any longer. Besides, I don't set much store by causes, after all; I am not a humanitarian. I cannot live any longer. I have stood this agony just as long as I can stand it. The first part of the curse of Cain I accept: I am cursed from the earth. But I will not accept the second part: I will not go on living, a vagabond and a wanderer, with a brand upon my forehead, and an unceasing fire in my heart. To-day will be the last day. I will finish this letter, and send it to you, and then I will . . . *cela va sans dire.*

"Don't say that I am leaving you to bear it alone. I could not help you in any way if I remained. We could never be anything to each other—with *that* between us! The way of the transgressor is hard; we should have to tread it; each would feel that it was the other's fault which had brought us there. We could never be anything to each other. We were happy last night? Yes, perhaps for a little while, with the short-lived ecstasy of passion. But afterward? For me it was worse than ever.

"Destiny seems to have been against us from the beginning. Good-by. I would wish to live if I could say I love you—if I could feel one spark of my old pure love for you, my innocent sweet love, in my heart. Good-by."

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I have been very ill since then; the doctors warn me that I may not have many months to live. I have written these pages in September and October, 1890. If I should die soon, they will be published. If I should disappoint the doctors, and live . . . ?

THE END.

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